

History of Manipur

JYOTIRMOY ROY
Vice-Principal, D. M. College
Imphal, Manipur



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FOREWORD

*Manipura Sana-Leimayol,
Chingna Koyna Pansaba,
Haona Koyna Panngakpa !*

Sang a poet of old. In a free version it reads :

This is not merely a poet's ode to his native country but imbosoms profound historical truths of the past of Manipur. He draws his theme from the history of the country. He sings how a prime his mother-country was in the land of Gold or the so-called 'Suvarnabhu' of old, and how its unique geographical feature helped it nurture a state within the fold of its own hills, and how from the happy relation between the hills and the vale, it could shine out in full sovereign splendour.

Manipur was formerly outside the pale of India. Aryavarta fell far too short in extent to enfold it. So did Bharatavarsha of later ages. Hence the Hindu Puranas locate it within the Kiratadesa. It was however, a 'Suvarnabhu' or Land of Gold, and formed geographically, a part of the so-called 'Survarnabhu' of old as so indicated by an old name of its, namely, 'Sanapung' which means 'Land of Gold'. Further, its own history together with foreign accounts, best evidences that this tract of land was a gold-producing country and that it had its own gold currency once.

Manipur is a hill-girt tract of land. The girding hills not only delineate its march but wall it off from the adjoining regions into a distinct geographical entity. So is the feature, none of them ventured to deny it an independent territorial existence. It remained an inter-territorial state between the two regions now known as Burma and Assam.

It is, as it were, a labyrinth carved out by nature. The

border hills not only make it hilled all round but shoot out off-shoots inwards. They form themselves into manifold ranges and run far into the interior till they cover eleven-twelfths of the whole extent of its surface and leave only a strip of land for a valley to lie lengthwise from north to south. This valley which is the metropolis was quite safe and secure from foreign inroads as the approaches hereto were only through glens and defiles whereon none but glendoveers could pace firm and secure. So, it had the opportunity to grow in power, make it felt far and wide and shine in full sovereign splendour from the earliest times until recently time wrought a change in its fortune and doomed it to lose its sovereignty in 1891 (at the hands of the British at the battle of Khomjom popularly known as the Manipur Trouble) and form consequently a part of Indian India of the British regime.

This tract lies at a cross-road. Every downrush of races from the north towards Indo-China and India in early times used to leave in this soil a remnant each. So did every onrush of people from India and outside towards Indo-China and Indonesia. Every uprush of humanities from Indonesia towards India followed suit. So, the land became, at the dawn of history, nay before its dawning, the homeland of several races whether akin or alien. In other words, batches or several peoples from different stocks of humanity loitered in their early movements to settle here in this soil. Some of them preferred the hills to the valley and lived isolated lives rearing, of course, with a jealous care, their respective tradition in its full primitive splendour and left the present tribals to represent them in the modern world. Of the rest, those who occupied the prime of the valley, had to enter into an agelong struggle against one another for self-preservation. Absorption of the weaker by the stronger went on in consequence for a long time. Only seven strongest powers, namely, the Ningthoujas, the Angoms, the Luwangs, the Khumans, the Moirangs, the Khaba-Nganbas and the Chengleis, who were already hybrids, survived only to interbreed themselves into ever the more a hybrid nationality in the so called Meiteis, the three-fold aspects of whose national life forms the main theme of the country's history.

This valley had the fortune to cradle saintly lives like Mangang Guru Punsiba, Luwang Guru Punsiba and Khuman

Guru Punsiba whose halo used to illumine man in the domain of knowledge. So, it had the good luck to nurse its own children, the Meiteis, to whom knowledge was never niggardly in unrolling its ample page rich with the spoils of time, into a finest people and nurture so, a civilisation of a high order as the Cretan soil or a Grecian land had the fortune to do. It had also the good luck to fondle in its lap many a wise pen to record all its activities on the barks of Aguru. But very unfortunately for it, none came forward to play the role of a Thucydides or of a Herodotus and wreath them neatly into a history and make a present of it to the world. Nonetheless, its two contributions to the world, namely, Manipuri polo and Manipuri dance, which are ever fresh and new in all the ages, bespeak how elevated its culture was and how high an order of civilisation it had.

Many a history has now been written. But none is so authentic as it seems. The reason is, of course, not far to seek. Manipur was absolute all through its past. Its society evolved on in its own course or got revolutionised in its own way. So did its religion. And its government followed suit. Neither India nor Burma had much direct influence thereon, but for a tint from time to time. Its history flowed on in its own course with little disturbance from without until as late as the eighteenth century when several cults of Neo-Vaishnabism flowed into this soil and wrought the present-day Manipur. Its activities and its achievements are all recorded in its own scripts unintelligible to the world. So the writers however profound scholars they may be, had to work at a forfeit, no less considerable since the building of a history of Manipur must needs call for a study of some of them at least. So, their works turn unauthentic. Some indigenous scholars also have produced some works. But they are students more of Purana than of history. So their works fall more in the category of Purana than that of history. So is the case, this country badly needs an authentic history of its own.

Prof. Jyotirmoy Roy has made a very nice contribution and produced a full history of Manipur on a scientific basis however in a nutshell it may be, in this history of his, namely, 'History of Manipur'. It is, so to say, the first book that has ever compiled the three periods of the history of Manipur. He has made

a step, nay, a stride forward from his predecessors. Somewhat scanty as it is in the first two periods as facts can hardly be gleaned from scripts other than the indigenous chronicles, he has done full justice to the last and made it a documentary one. A student of history is he. His is to teach history. His is to study history. Why should not his history be a genuine one ! His profound study, his untiring labour and his unfailing perseverance are vividly discernible in every page of it. It is a precious gift to the land and an eye-opener to those who are interested in making a research in respect of Manipur and its people.

I thank Prof. Roy and that from the very core of my heart, for the honour done to me in asking me write a word or two in this valuable work of his. Further, I shall remain ever indebted to him for his best regards for me as a friend of his.

D. M. College,
Imphal, Manipur
29.4.58

A. MINAKETAN SINGH

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THE first edition of my 'History of Manipur' was published in 1958. The book earned favourable reviews from the Press—*The Manipur Times*, *The Statesman*, *The Hindustan Standard*, *The Hindu*, *The Calcutta Review* and the *American Anthropologist* and aroused keen interest among the readers. As a result all the copies of the first edition were sold out within a short period. Meanwhile the study of the history of Manipur has gained considerable importance. The Jawaharlal Nehru University (J. N. U) Centre at Imphal has included history of Manipur in its syllabus for the Post Graduate studies in History.

In the first edition of my book I attempted to reconstruct the skeleton of the political history of Manipur up to the period of Independence in 1947. But since then down to 1972 many important changes have taken place. Manipur is now a full-fledged state within the Indian Union. Manipuri language is recognised by the Sahitya Academy and Manipur literature is being taught up to the Post Graduate level. Big industries based on agriculture, Hydro-electric and irrigation projects are also coming up. These again are having great impact on the economy and society of the land. Rapid changes in the socio-economic patterns are noticeable in the hills also. Indeed, the life in Manipur today is not the same as it was found by Johnstone or Hodson.

In view of all these changes which have taken place in Manipur since 1947, I sincerely felt that time has come to bring out an up-to-date edition of the History of Manipur. The result is this Second edition of the History of Manipur. Besides incorporating some new facts here and there and giving a brief history of the Manipuri literature and the progress in education in Manipur I have retained in the second edition all the chapters of the first edition. Over and above, two new chapters "From Integration to Statehood" and 'The Sons of the Hills' have been added to this volume. In preparing the history of Manipuri literature I took the help of Shri Ch. Manihar Singh, Head of the Department of Manipuri, D. M. College and Shri E. Dinamani Singh of the same Department. The materials

for writing ‘The Sons of the Hills’ have been collected from a paper read by Shri G. Kabui, Associate Professor of History, J. N. University Centre, Imphal. The cover jacket has been designed by Shri Th. Tombi Singh, Lecturer, Imphal College. The two maps included in this book have been drawn by Md. S. A. Ansari, Head of the Department of Geography, D. M. College, Imphal. In the preparation of the manuscript I consulted now and then Shri B. R. Sengupta, Associate Professor J. N. University Centre, Imphal and received his valuable advice. I am indebted to each of them for their kind co-operation.

In bringing out the second edition of the History of Manipur I was greatly encouraged by Prof. G. Kabui without which the book would not have been revised and published. I am also grateful to my esteemed friend Shri A. Minaketan Singh, Associate Prof. and Head of the Department of Manipuri, J. N. University Centre, Imphal, who has favoured me by writing the “Foreword”.

I am also indebted to Shri M. Tarachand Singh, Mr. Peter and Shri Haripada Chakraborty for typing out the manuscript without accepting any remuneration. For arranging the publication of this book I am thankful to my respected uncle Shri Nalini Kanta Bhattacharjee. Shri Subhash Chakraborty, Lecturer, P.G. B.T. College, Imphal took keen interest in the publication of the book by watching the progress in printing from the beginning to the end.

Lastly, I am thankful to my publisher who readily accepted the responsibility in publishing the book and has brought it out within a reasonable time.

Since the book was printed in Calcutta it was not possible for me, living at Imphal, to correct the proof myself. Hence, here and there some mistakes in printing have crept in the text for which I apologise to the readers.

JOYTIRMOY ROY

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

WHEN I came to Manipur in 1951, as a lecturer in history in the D. M. College, I felt naturally interested in the history of the people of this land having a rich cultural heritage and a long political tradition. To my great disappointment I could find no book on the subject and learnt that so far no attempt has been made in that direction. I consulted many important persons about the prospects of making an attempt to reconstruct the history of Manipur. Among those who encouraged me in writing a history of Manipur, the names of Shri A. C. Guha, ex-Minister of State, Union Government and Shri Dwijamani Dev Sharma, Chairman Territorial Council, Manipur deserve special mention.

There had been masses of materials for writing history but most of them were destroyed during the successive wars. Even of those left after the wars many are untraceable today due to lack of organised and systematic efforts to trace and preserve them: I gradually realised the difficulty in writing the history of Manipur. Yet, I did not give up the attempt. My single-handed effort in this respect is bound to produce a very inadequate result. In the search for materials I could not get co-operation from many whom I considered resourceful. In spite of it I shall be ungrateful if I do not mention the names of Pandit Raj Shri Atombapu Sharma, Vidya Ratna ; Shri R. K. Sanahal Singh ; Shri W. Tomcha Singh, Shri N. Nilkamal Singh, Asst. Secretary, Manipur Administration ; Shri N. B. Sinha, Lecturer, D. M. College ; Dr D. B. Dev ; Shri A. Minaketan Singh, Lecturer, D. M. College and Shri R. K. Shitaljit Singh, Headmaster, Ramlal Pal High School, Imphal who helped me in various ways in the preparation of my manuscript.

Owing to my ignorance in the old Manipuri script, I could not handle materials written in archaic Manipuri connected with the early periods of the history of Manipur. Hence the chapters dealing with them cannot claim authenticity. These have been added to arouse interest of the scholars who might devote themselves to the study of the subject. I have tried to arrange the

materials in a systematic way from Gharib Niwaz onwards. Some of the Chapters (*IV, V, VI, VII, VIII*) of this book were published in the Calcutta Review.

In presenting facts and offering views, I have constantly placed before me the high ideal of historical truth. The work of the reconstructions of the history of a people cannot be done successfully within such a short period by single-handed effort. Hence it will not be legitimate to claim thoroughness or perfection in this volume. I shall consider my labour fruitful if my work succeeds in making others feel the importance of the history of Manipur and in drawing the attention of the competent scholars to throw more light on the subject.

The completion of this volume in the midst of multifarious distractions is a matter of great satisfaction to me. For my part I may humbly add that I shall always value reasoned criticism more than the unqualified praise of kind friends. I beg of my readers to give suggestions for improvement which will always receive my best attention.

D. M. College, Imphal
25.4.58

JYOTIRMOY ROY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

MANIPUR, a small state surrounded by ranges of hills, is one of the beauty spots on the earth and rightly called "The Jewel of India". Her velvety green fields, transparent lakes, zigzag streams and bracing climate induce a visitor to feel as if he is in Kashmir. The merit of Manipur does not lie in size and population. In these respects she is smaller than an average district. She has made her mark by her valuable contributions in the field of Indian dances. The game of polo is said to have been originated in this land. The civilization here is rural and the economic life of the people is not dominated by the capitalists. Agriculture and cottage industry are the main occupations of the majority. While the men work in the field women weave at home. The embroidery works of the Manipuri women are diverse and excellent. The Manipuris keep their houses, clothings and utensils very clean. The society here is very democratic and is not affected very much by caste system. The women enjoy a fair amount of freedom. They are very hard workers and share the burden of the family with the male members. The men have special aptitude for craftsmanship. The Manipuri literature is also growing very fast and at present in the Eastern India it occupies the third position, the first and second being Bengali and Assamese respectively. "Manipuri Brahmans have penetrated into Burma also, and they have been for the last few centuries important missionaries of the Sanskrit culture of India in South-Eastern Assam and Burma." Due to geographical isolation Manipur remained politically outside India. But this did not affect the flow of Indian culture in Manipur. The culture of modern Manipur is undoubtedly a part of Indian culture. But in this respect Manipur was not a blind imitator. Whatever she accepted, she did it in her own fashion. More-

over, she was not only a receiver but a giver also. She has her credit in dances and in polo games. Her Rasa Dance is of pan-Indian popularity now, through Rabindranath's Santiniketan School of the Dance, through the interpretations of masters of modern Indian dance like Uday Sankar and through performances in the cinema. Now by the political integration of Manipur with the Indian Union, the ties between Manipur and the rest of India have been further strengthened. The history of Manipur is now a part of Indian history. However small in size and population she may be, undoubtedly she stands on her own quality. Time has come when historians should pay their attention to the reconstruction of the history of Manipur.

THE LAND OF MANIPUR

In old days Manipur was known by the neighbouring states by different names given by them. In Rennell's Memoir and maps of India it is called "Mecklay". In the Narrative of Symes and in maps of that period Manipur is called "Cassy". To the Shans it was known as 'kase' and to the Burmese as Kathe, a corruption of the same word, the Ahoms called it Makeli and the Cacharies Magli, while the old Assamese name for it is Moglan¹. There are differences of opinion whether the name Manipur is associated with this land from very ancient time or in recent period. Whatever it may be, in view of the old manuscripts it can be safely asserted that the name Manipur of this land became popular only in the modern age.

The present Manipur State lies in longitude $94^{\circ} 47'$ East of Greenwich and Latitude $23^{\circ} 50'$ — $25^{\circ} 50'$ North covering an area of 8628 square miles. In ancient Manipuri literature it is found that the state had a larger area. In the east it touched the borders of China and Burma. Some portions of Modern Burma also then formed a part of Manipur. In the south it is said it had been extended up to the sea. In the north and in the north-east it extended upto the kingdoms of Hidimbapur and Moran respectively. Of the total area of modern Manipur the valley covers nearly 700 square miles. the rest is covered by hills. The Manipuri community lives only in the valley. The hill area is the abode of the Nagas and the Kukis.

According to the geologists Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Garo Hills and a considerable portion of Bengal were under water. On the north-east of these submerged places there stood the hill ranges of Assam. At that time there was a great continent in the present Pacific Ocean. Owing to some cataclysmic change in the surface of the earth, the Pacific-continent went down the water and the submerged lands of Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Garo hills and Bengal came above the sea-level as the water receded from those places. According to geological calculations this happened not long before 100 million years. The discovery of various fossils of marine fishes in those places have amply proved the above theory. Though the sea receded from that area the valley portion of Manipur remained under water for a long time.

The Manipuri Purans also refer to this fact. There, it is found that in the beginning everything was under water. Nine Laipumthou (gods) and seven Lainuras (goddesses) working together made 64 hillocks. Thus the earth was created. After that, one day Lord Shiva with his consort Parvati landed on the top of the Nongmaiking Hill to play Rasa Dance in the valley of Manipur. But it was still under water. Lord Shiva with his trident made a hole through the hills which formed an outlet for the excess water. Gradually according to the will of Lord Vishnu the beautiful valley of Manipur came out of the water.

THE MEITHEI COMMUNITY

According to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee "The Meitheis or Manipuris are the most advanced section of the Kuki Chin people". They have their kinsmen in Burma and appear to have settled in ancient time in Manipur and the Lushai Hill, as well as in the Chittagong hill tracts. These Indo-Mongoloids are known to the Assamese as Chins; and Kuki-chin has been adopted as a composite and inclusive name for them². T. C. Hodson is of opinion that the group name "Meithei has been derived from Mi=man and thei=separate. But Brian H. Hodgson in a foot-note to a contribution to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1853 expressed the view that 'in the Moitay' of Manipur we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Kochin Chinese 'Moy'. In other words, the Manipurian tribe,

called Cossiah by the Bengalis belongs to the Moi section of the great tribe called Tai by themselves and Shanvel Syam by the Burmese the sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native"³. But in view of great Shan influence over the culture and politics of Manipur it is difficult especially on linguistic grounds, to group the Meitheis with the Tai races when the structure and vocabulary of the Meithei language alike agree with those of Tibeto-Burman races.

A small section of the Manipuris strongly believe that they are of western and Hindu descent. On linguistic and anthropometric grounds this idea is quite untenable.

The modern Manipuri race is a composite one formed out of several tribes. The fertile valley of Manipur witnessed the invasions of different tribes from time immemorial. At different periods the Nagas, the Kukis, the Shans, the Chinese came and settled in this land and merged themselves into the Manipuri community. Some Aryan and Dravidian features are also found in them.

MANIPUR OF THE MAHABHARATA

The rulers of Manipur believed that they were the descendants of Arjuna, the third Pandava of the Mahabharata. The story of Arjuna's visit to Manipur and his marriage with princess Chitrangada is wellknown. Second time when he visited Manipur he was opposed and defeated by his own son Babhrubahan⁴. But there are differences of opinion whether Manipur referred to in the Mahabharata is identical with the present Manipur State. According to Wilson Manipur of the Mahabharata was situated by the side of the sea and that cannot be identified with the modern Manipur which is far away from the sea-coast. Shri Nagendra Nath Bose in his *Viswakosh* has located Manipur in Kalinga. Gait also subscribes to this view. Dr. Apte locates it in the north of Madura. But Padmanath Vidyavinode has tried to refute those views and established that Manipur of the Mahabharata is identical with the modern Manipur⁵. The Puranas of Manipur also trace the Royal lineage of Manipur from Babruvahana. But in this respect the Puranas cannot be relied much because they were very much influenced by the Brahmanical Purana stories⁶.

AGE OF THE CIVILIZATION

It may be difficult to tell the exact age of the Manipuri civilization. But, that it is an old one is indicated by many direct and indirect evidences. If Manipur of the Mahabharata be the same as Manipur of today then her civilization must have existed earlier than the 4th century B.C., when the Mahabharata was written. Col. Gerini in his Researches on Potemys geography writes "According to Burmese Royal chronicles (Maharaja Vamsa) Dhajaraja, a king of Sakya race, settled at Manipur, about 550 B.C. and later on conquered, old or upper Pagan".

Harvey in his history of Burma says "upper Burma lay inaccessible, true, it was nearer to China which from the 2nd century B.C. used trade routes through Burma.... Two were along the Irrawaddy and Salween River, the third down the Chindwin River and through Manipur took Caravans a three months journey to Afganisthan where the silks of China were exchanged for the gold of Europe." Sir A. Phayre describes the route thus—"The route by which Kshatriya princes arrived (in Burma) is indicated in the traditions as being through Manipur which lies with the basin of Irrawaddy"⁸. Among the coins collected in Manipur by W. Yumjao Singh four pieces belong to the second century A.D.⁹. The discovery of these coins also indicates that there were trade relations between Manipur and India even in that old period. Accounts of Hiuen Tsang and Kamekshya Tantra refer that Manipur was once a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. Sir James Johnstone writes, "The early history of Manipur is lost in obscurity but there can be no doubt that it has existed as an independent kingdom from a very early period. In the days when the Indian branch of the Aryans was still in its progressive and colonizing stage this district was repeatedly passed over by one wave after another of invaders intent on penetrating into the remotest part of Burma".

RESEARCHES ON THE HISTORY OF MANIPUR

Like other branches of Indian history, the work in the reconstruction of the history of Manipur was begun first by the British Officers who came from time to time and served in Manipur. Capt. R. B. Pemberton, Joint-Commissioner in Manipur, may

be regarded as the pioneer in this field. His "Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India," 1835, is a mine of information about Manipur. He was followed by Lt. Col. Mc. Culloch. He came to Manipur as Assistant Political Agent in 1840, "he became Political Agent in 1845 and held that post, with a year's intermission, until 1867. In the long period of 27 years he acquired a most intimate knowledge of the State and its inhabitants; he married a Manipuri lady from the family of Raja Nar Singh.... He was a man of culture and literary activity....." He wrote "an account of the valley of Munnipore and of the hill tribes, with a comparative vocabulary of the Munnipore and other languages" and published it in 1859. Ever since its publication his work has been the chief authority on its subject¹⁰.

Mc. Culloch's successor Dr. R. Brown published his work "Statistical Account of Manipur" in 1874. Another contribution to the ethnography and history of the State was made by Mr. G. H. Damant of the Indian Civil Service whose papers were published in the journal of the Asiatic Society. He was greatly interested in the Archaic Literature of Manipur¹¹. Ethel St. Clair Grimwood, the wife of the Political Agent Mr. Grimwood, published her "My Three Years in Manipur" in 1891. It throws a flood of light upon the events leading to the tragedy of 1891. James Johnstone's work "My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills" published in 1896 also serves many valuable facts about the history of Manipur.

Towards the close of the 19th century Nithor Nath Banerjee translated the Ningthourol or Meitei chronicles. Umesh Chandra Ghose also translated the same chronicle. T. C. Hodson in his work "The Meitheis," published in 1908 made much use of the translations¹².

In the field of archaeological studies W. Yumjao Singh made valuable contributions. For many years he carried on his investigations privately and brought to light many interesting relics relating to the past history of Manipur. In 1929 he got the permission to excavate at the old palace site at Shangaithen. Except some remains of pottery and a few other miscellaneous objects nothing of importance was found there. Since 1933-34 the state granted a small sum annually to carry on his researches. Another important excavation was made at Kameng, where some pottery of the 17th century and a few other articles were found.

Among his collections there are many coins, some inscriptions, manuscripts, terra-cotta plates, and cups and an image of Buddha, one 'Sharinda' and thirteen cannons. Coins are of different periods. Some of them belong to the second century A.D. A small Assamese silver coin identified as a coin of Pramatta Singh of Assam minted in 1751 A.D. was also found. Several inscriptions were found in the hills near the valley, and seven old copper plates together with fragments of others had been collected and deciphered. Some ancient manuscripts in archaic Manipuri and also some Shan, old Bengali, Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts were found. Shan manuscripts have not yet been deciphered. Some fragments of potteries were recovered from the cantonment area and from the old palace site at Awang Potsangbam.

A stone image of Buddha without the head was also found in an old tank. A musical instrument (Sharavel in Manipuri, Sharinda in Bengali) was acquired. "It is said to have been made by Raja Modhuchandra in the 18th century who played it when in captivity as a hostage in Ava". 13 cannons were recovered from the Imphal river near the old palace. Writings on some of them have been deciphered. "One is of bell metal dated 1807 and the oldest is dated 1670 A.D. bearing the name of Udayaditya Singh of Assam¹³.

The manuscripts collected by W. Yumjao Singh consist of literary, historical, astronomical, astrological and miscellaneous other works of which mention may be made of Cheitharon Kumbaba, the Ningthourol Shingkak, the Poireiton Khunthokpa, Dharani Samhita, Srimat Bhagabat. "The Cheitharol Kumbaba or the royal chronicle has been the most valuable for historical investigations, as it professes to record all the important daily transactions and occurrences of the State.... By orders of Jai Singh this book was rewritten as the former copy was no more available then". "The Nighthourol Shingkak is a work written in the way of prediction. It professes to predict all important events that would happen from the time of Khagembra downward. It, therefore, professes to be a work of the early 17th century. It is an anonymous work, and in this book, we see for the first time Gharib Niwaz's having had some Naga connection in his childhood. It describes in the way of prediction —the part played by Gharib Newaz in the religious reform of his

time. Although the book is much antdated, yet there are grounds to believe that it must have been written by one of the old school courtiers of Gharib Niwaz."

"The Poireiton Khunthokpa is the most conspicuous one of all pre-Gharib Niwaz manuscripts. From a linguistic point of view it seems to be much earlier than any of the books that come under our review. Circumstantial and other incidental evidences would confirm that the book might have been of the time of the third century A.D. It describes the colonization of the valley by a band of people from the 'land of death' under Poireiton. They first established their colony near the Langol Hill.... Before the arrival of this colonizing party, the land was inhabited by some people who were no better than the beasts of the forests, who did not know even the use of fire or of any iron implement. It was this band of colonists from the land of death that brought civilization to this valley".

Dharani Samhita is a Sanskrit work written at the time of Gambhir Singh. It gives an account of the valley as well as its inhabitants.

Srimat Bhagabat is an Assamese translation from the Sanskrit. Probably it was brought by Jai Singh from the Court of Assam¹⁴.

After W. Yumjao Singh none has so far taken up the work of archaeological researches in Manipur. Due to lack of proper attention most of his findings are untraceable now.

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CHAPTER II

THE PURANIC AGE

THOUGH the civilization of Manipur is very old yet for want of systematic history on the basis of accurate chronology the period before the 8th century A.D. is considered as purely the Puranic Age. It may be difficult to prove the historicity of the stories of the Puranic Age, yet their importance in literature, religion and society will be always recognized. There is ample scope to write novels, dramas, lyrics with those stories viz., the creation of the earth, Rasa dance of Shiva, the advent of Poireiton, legends of Pakhangba, Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi, Khamba and Thoibi. Some of the stories are given below.

THE CREATION OF THE EARTH

It is found in the old Puaran, Leithak Leikharol that one day Mahadev narrated Ganesh the story of the creation of Manipur. In the beginning, Manipur was under water. Nine Laipumningthous and seven Lainuras created the land of Manipur by throwing earth into water. After the formation of the land Atia Gurushidaba, the Lord of the Universe entrusted God Kodin with the task of making mortal beings. Accordingly Kodin placed before the Guru, seven monkeys and seven frogs. But the Guru did not approve of them because they had no intelligence. Kodin then produced an image of man. The Guru then bestowed life to it. Thus the first man was brought on this earth. Afterwards the frogs were placed in water, the monkeys were placed in the hills, and the man was placed in the valley. All of them were mortals. Finally Kojinta-Thokpa (the sun in human form) and Ashiva (the moon in human form) were created. At the end of the creation the Guru disappeared.

After a long period the Guru appeared again at Wankhei through a hole in the Kurumching hill. He then called his two

sons Kuptreng and Sentreng. Along with these two sons seven other gods also came to Manipur in mortal forms.

The seven goddesses who came with the Guru were then given in marriage with those seven gods. Each of these Gods became the founder of Angom, Ningthouja, Luang, Khuman, Moriang, Chenglei Khaba and Nganba, these seven families respectively.

One day the Guru in order to test the faith and devotion of his sons towards him appeared in the Vijaya river in the form of a dead cow. Sentreng on seeing the movement of the tail of the dead cow recognised it to be their father, the Guru. Kuptreng though failed to agree with Sentreng, joined with the latter in dragging the dead cow to the shore. The Guru then assumed his proper form and told Sentreng "Son! you have rightly recognised your father. Henceforth you would be known as Pakhangba (he who has known his father) "Kuptreng had the complexion of hot gold. Hence he came to be known as Snamahi (Sna=Gold; Mahi=Fire).

On another day the Guru called Pakhangba and Snamahi by his side. When they came, he told them. "I have decided to give the throne to one of you who will be able to report to me first after going round the world". On hearing this Snamahi, the elder brother went to the South. The younger brother Pakhangba who was comparatively weak following the advice of Leimarolshidabi moved round the seat of the Guru seven times and reported to his father because he already knew that the effect of moving round the seat of the Guru is the same as that of going round the world. The Guru became very much pleased to see his devotion and nominated him as his successor. When he came to know of it after going round the world Snamahi became furious. In view of the imminent fight between the two brothers the Guru brought out a solution agreeable to both. Both of them would rule Manipur by rotation, for 12 years at a time. While one would ascend the throne the other would be worshipped as a household deity. Thus while the peace was restored the Guru disappeared leaving behind his attendant "Taobala" (the snake God).

NONGPOKNINGTHOU AND PANTHOIBI

God Nongpokningthou used to reside at the top of the Nong-

maiing hill. He is considered as the incarnation of the God Shiva, the Lord of the East. Parvati, the consort of Shiva was born in the house of a chief at Loichang Hill in the name of Panthoibi. One day while Panthoibi was working alone in the field of her father, Nongpokningthou appeared at that place and saw Panthoibi.

The matchless beauty of each made the other spell-bound. They themselves did not know how long they remained gazing at each other's eyes. The love which was lying dormant in the heart of Panthoibi arose. She had a shivering, tears came rolling down her eyes, and she soon fell fainted. When her father came he found there Nongpokningthou dressed in tiger's skin. But he failed to recognise him. He thought that her daughter must have been frightened at the sight of this strange being. He then brought her home. Nobody knew that the heart of Panthoibi was burning with a feeling of strong love for Nongpokningthou. Panthoibi regained her consciousness, yet she did not come to her normal state. Her father treated her in various ways but had no effect. At last he thought of giving her in marriage. He selected Khaba and handed over Panthoibi in his hand. But even in the house of her husband she showed no sign of improvement. On the contrary she became more indifferent and shunned all company.

Nongpokningthou, the Lord of her soul was her only object of thought and adoration. In her mind she already dedicated herself to him. The Goddess of love at last listened to the prayer of Panthoibi. Nongpokningthou, on hearing of the marriage of Panthoibi with Khaba became almost mad and went out in search of her. Panthoibi also went out in search of him. They met at a place in Imphal and were united.

Khaba made a vain attempt to find her out. After some time when he was able to unravel the mystery, his mind became filled with reverence for Panthoibi. He built a temple in his house and began to worship the objects associated with her memory. Even today the people of Manipur worship Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi as incarnations of Shiva and Parvati.

NUMIT KAPPA (HE WHO HUNTED THE SUN)

In the beginning of the creation, the mother of Gods gave birth

to five children. But unfortunately the first two died of disease and the third was killed by fishermen. Taohuirengba (sun) and Nongjenba (sun) survived. They began to rise and set in the sky by turn. Nongjenba's servant Haodongla was a cunning as well as an indolent person. He was jealous of his master who had to do merely a simple task of wandering in the Sky, and that also by turn with his brother. On the other hand he had to remain busy throughout the whole day to please his mother. Once an evil design of teaching a good lesson to his master came to his mind. He told his wife Hauno Chankanu to bring a bamboo. Accordingly she went to her uncle's house and brought a bamboo. Haodongla at once set himself to the task of making a bow and arrows. For full five days he remained engaged in it. When the arrows became sufficiently dry he put deadly poison in their blades and placed them in a quiver. Then he told his wife to stand before him with a pitcher full of water on her head. He would test his aim on the pitcher. On seeing the activities of her husband Chankanu became wonder-struck. With a feeling mixed with fear and curiosity, she stood before Haodongla as directed by him. When the arrow shot from Haodongla's bow hit the pitcher, it broke and the water pouring down over her fair face completely wetted her cloth. She thought it to be a good fun and burst into laughter. Haodongla's next target was the ear-ring of his wife. This time also the arrow just passed through the hole without touching the ring. Thus being confident of his archery he decided to go for hunting large animals.

One day while pursuing a wild boar he stopped all on a sudden hearing the rattling sound of the moving chariot of Taohuirengba, who was then rising in the eastern horizon behind the trees. Golden rays were coming out in all directions from his crown. At once the idea of becoming 'Numit Kappa' came to his mind. He gave up the pursuit of the boar and lay in wait for Taohuirengba. When the chariot of the Sun God reached the Meridian, Haodongla shot his arrow which instead of hitting the Sun God hit one of his horses. Instantaneously the chariot with its rider was dislodged from its orbit and fell near a place called Maring. Since that incident Taohuirengba disappeared forever. At the sight of the fate of the elder brother Nongjenba also for fear of Numit Kappa hid himself in a cave. In their absence the earth remained covered with thick darkness.

All works stopped. Fields and markets remained deserted. The miseries of the people knew no bounds. It seemed as if the creation would come to its doom. The ten gods Nongpok, Chingkhei' Awangpurel, Khanachaoba, Thangjing, Shampurel, Loiya-rakpa, Kaobaru, Kaorurel and Marjing made a thorough search for the two suns but in vain.

The night which fell knew no end. In this state of things, once two girls moving with torches in their hands found a glow of a very powerful light, coming out from the mouth of a distant cave. They suspected that the sun might remain in hiding there and began to talk about it among themselves. On hearing their discussions the ten gods requested Thongnak Lairemma, a woman endowed with supernatural power, to please the sun God. Lai-remma then went near that cave and prayed Nongjenba to appear in the Sky as before. Nongjenba narrated to her his sad plight, how out of the five brothers two died of diseases, one killed by fishermen and finally how Taohuirengba was shot by Numit Kappa Haodongla. Having said this the sun God disappeared. Lairemma came back disappointed and reported the matter to the ten gods. The gods then went to the princess of heaven, Panthoibi and entreated her to exert her influence over Nongjenba to rise again in the Sky.

Panthoibi told them to erect a high tower for easy communication between heaven and earth and make arrangements for the worship of the sun. All the women were asked to join with her in the chorus in praise of Nongjenba. When the 'Puja' was done, the chorus began. The sun god came out of the cave and sat on the tower. But that brilliance which he had was no longer with him. The priests of Pakhangba and Thangjing sat for another 'Puja'.

Waters from different sacred rivers and streams were brought and poured on Nonjenba. He again regained his pristine brilliance. The long night at last came to an end. The darkness which enveloped the mother earth disappeared. The day dawned amidst wide rejoicings. For long days men and women in every house sang songs in praise of the sun god. Normal life was restored. Markets and fields were full of activities again.

THE LEGENDS OF MOIRANG

God Thangjing appeared on earth in the form of a boar and

created Moirang. In the beginning of the 'Kali Yuga' Ewang Fang Fang Panglenhanba was the ruler of Moirang. Under his rule Moirang became a large and prosperous kingdom: Living in the midst of plenty, people forgot Thangjing and their mouths were full of praise for Panglenhanba. Thangjing was unable to tolerate this ungratefulness of Moirang people. He sent Yang Khonglai to terrorise them. Yang Khonglai made such terrible sounds in every night, that out of fear nobody could sleep. At first it was taken as the activities of evil spirits; but later on when they came to know that the wrath of their God Thangjing was the source of all troubles, their fear knew no bounds. Panglenhanba's men at once called in Maibi Gang Thang Marimaila Duheng Langmei Thouba. When she came Panglenhanba told her to propitiate the god. She accordingly went to the deep forest and offered necessary 'puja' to Yang Khonglai. At the sight of Maibi's devotion Yang Khonglai became pleased. He not only agreed to spare the people of Moirang but also to rebuild Punglenhanba's palace which he had destroyed. Panglenhaba then ordered all people to offer 'puja' to the temple of Thangjing. Religion was thus restored.

The rulers of Moirang in course of time became oppressive to the subdued tribes. The Khumans were chafing under them. During the reign of Laifangcheng oppressions became so intolerable that they rose in rebellion. Kanthouba Shafaba, the minister of the king was the root of all evils. He was captured by the rebels and left in a lonely forest with his hands and feet tied in a tree. Gods were moved by his deep remorse. They set him free. He came back to his house. Within one year when a son was born to him, he left Moirang and went to the land of the Meitheis.

Once the king of Moirang came across the beautiful son of Konthouba and adopted him. By the grace of Thangjing as the boy grew up, he acquired exceptional qualities. But the well-wishers of the king could not view it with favour and expressed their apprehension to the king, that in future he might occupy the throne by removing his adoptive father. The king also lending his ears to his advisers threw the boy into the prison for seven years.

On the other hand, since the imprisonment of the boy there was no rain for several months. Moirang fell under the grip of

severe famine. The king felt helpless.

The boy communicated to the king the Message he received from Thangjing. "The king by detaining an innocent person has incurred the displeasure of the God". The boy was at once released. At long last rain came down like the blessing of God. But till then the guardian deity of Moirang was not fully satisfied. Epidemic visited the land. Villages became depopulated. The king apologised to the boy for his injustice and nominated him as his successor to the throne. The boy then prayed to Thangjing to bestow again his blessings upon Moirang. Thangjing was then pleased. By his grace prosperity soon returned.

KHAMBA AND THOIBI,

Once Horamyeama quarrelling with his brother, the Khuman chief had left Khuman and settled in Moirang. His grand son Purenba was famous for his courage and physical strength. One day when the king of Moirang went out for hunting, he was simultaneously attacked by seven tigers. At this, all his companions except Purenba fled away. Purenba alone came to the rescue of the king. One after another, he killed all the tigers with his spear. The king became very pleased with him. Having no daughter to offer he gave his chief queen to his saviour. After some time Purenba's wife gave birth to a daughter. She was named Khamnu. Next a very beautiful son was born to her. He was called Khamba. But unfortunately soon after the birth of Khamba, Purenba and his wife died. The burden of the family then fell entirely on Khamnu. She had to work in the house of the neighbours to maintain her younger brother.

Chinkhu Telheiba, the king of Moirang, had no issue. His brother Chingku Akhuba had a very beautiful daughter named Thoibi. The king looked after her as his own daughter. Once in the market of Moirang Khamnu met Thoibi. They were almost of the same age. On hearing the sad plight of this girl and her brother the princess was greatly moved. She made friendship with Khamnu and presented her many articles. After some days they met again. This time Thoibi requested Khamnu to accompany her in catching fish in the Loktak Lake. On hearing the intention of Thoibi the king fixed a date and announced that no man should ~~cross the Jhalkai on Pehte day~~.

According to previous engagement Khamnu leaving her brother at home accompanied the princess to the lake. Khamba was then sleeping. God Thangjing appeared to him in dream and told him to go to the Loktak. As soon as the dream ended he awoke and went straight to the lake. A boat was already there near the shore.

He boarded it and began to row. Suddenly a strong wind blew and drove his boat near an island. Thoibi and Khamnu were then catching fish at that place. The eyes of Khamba and Thoibi met almost simultaneously. Both of them attracted each other at the first sight. The princess came to know from Khamnu that Khamba was her brother. At once she was filled with anxiety, lest the king should come to know his presence in the lake violating his order. Thoibi instructed him to return home as early as possible. No sooner had he reached home, than they also arrived there. Thoibi was never so delighted even in her palace as she became in that simple hut of the two orphans. She went to the temple of their family and prayed "O Lord, Khumal Lakpa ! Grant me a place in this house so that I may worship you throughout my life".

Khamnu took it very lightly and began to cut jokes with her. But the princess was firm in her resolve. She put her gold bangles into water and made a solemn vow that she would never dedicate her love to another person except Khamba. As Khamba grew up, he became strong and courageous like his father. He defeated all in race and wrestling. But his strength and love for Thoibi brought for him number of hazards. Kongyamba, a notable wrestler and favourite of the King, became his rival even in the matter of love.

One day Kongyamba heard from the women of Khumal that a wild bull was creating a great disturbance in the place between the two rivers—Ikop and Waithau. At once he conceived a plan to destroy Khamba. He went straight to the King and told him "Maharaj ! God Thangjing told me in dream that He would be very pleased if the flesh of the wild bull wandering in the region between the Ikop and Waithau is offered to him."

At the same time he falsely added, "Khamba is very eager to go and catch hold of that bull alive. He is only waiting for your orders." Kongyamba's intention was that Khamba would be asked by the King to catch that bull alive and in that attempt

he would surely be killed. Khamba was called at once by the King and given that task. He was quick to understand the trick of Kongyamba. But he was not a man to step back in the face of a danger. On receiving the command of the king he went home and from there he proceeded to catch the bull. Before he started, his sister Khamnu told him "Brother ! this bull once belonged to our father. If you utter the name of our father before it, and show this silk-rope, it will recognise you and come under your control." It happened so. Khamba came out of the forest on the back of the bull. The king was very pleased and gave him many presents. He also promised to offer him the hand of Thoibi, Kangjamba's plan was upset. His face turned pale.

After this incident one day while the Jubraj, the father of Thoibi, was busy in testing his aim with his bow, Khamba went there. The Jubraj noticed that he was dressed in his shirt. He did not know that it was presented to Khamba by his daughter Thoibi. He thought that he must have stolen it from his house and his mind was filled with hatred against him. Kangjamba was also present there. He did not fail to read the workings of the Jubraj's mind. To earn the favour of the Jubraj, he exploited that opportunity to the full. The Jubraj became very pleased at his service and promised to offer Thoibi to him. Nongholba a friend of Khamba's father reminded him about the promise of the king. But it was of no avail. He remained firm on his decision.

When Thoibi knew it, she came to her wit's end. She did not know how to change her father's mind. One day she procured from Khamba some very sweet fruits. When the Jubraj came back from hunting she offered them to him. After eating those fruits the Jubraj became very much pleased. He enquired of his daughter from where she got them. "Your would be son-in-law, Khamba has presented them to you", answered Thoibi, as if she did not hear anything about her father's resolution. No sooner had he heard the name of Khamba, than the Jubraj became furious, and struck her with the bubble-bubble in his hand. Thoibi fell fainting instantaneously. Hours passed, yet she did not regain her consciousness. In the meantime the Jubraj's temper cooled down. He tried various methods to restore her daughter's consciousness, but to no effect. Then as the last resort, he drew his mouth near her ears and told, "Thoibi !

awake, I shall hand you over to Khamba." On hearing the name of Khamba, she at once returned to normalcy.

Some days after this incident Kangjamba's men caught hold of Khamba and severely beat him. Then at the instance of the Jubaraj his hands and feet were tied to the leg of an elephant which dragged him on the road for a while. Khamba's body appeared nearly lifeless.

His enemies then taking him to be dead threw his body into a deep forest. The Goddess Panthoibi appeared to Thoibi in dream and told her in detail about the tortures upon Khamba and the condition in which he was lying in the forest. She at once woke up from sleep and went straight to Khamba in that forest. She unfastened the rope from his hands and brought back his consciousness by careful nursing.

On hearing of such inhuman torture upon Khamba his well-wisher Nongthalba grew very much agitated. He brought the matter to the notice of the king who threw the Jubaraj into the prison. But it had no effect on the decision of the Jubaraj. On the contrary his feelings were further enraged against Thoibi. After his release he decided to banish Thoibi. Before her departure Thoibi met Khamba and told him "Dear, don't forget me. I feel this would be our last ordeal. After that we should be united."

None had the courage to go against the decision of the Jubaraj. A gloom cast over all faces. Women were crying. Amidst sighs and wailings princess Thoibi, the darling of Moirang, proceeded on exile. Gradually all familiar faces and places were passed and left behind. Her unaccustomed legs became tired of long walk. She sat under a tree for rest. In the meantime Khamba arrived there. The two lovers again met before the final parting away. It was a touching scene. Their hearts melted in deep sorrow. Tears came down from the four eyes in copious streams. Khamba presented her lover a stick, which would be useful in crossing the hills. Thoibi accepted it but did not take it with her. She planted it there in the ground and said, "Here I plant the symbol of our love. If we remain true to each other, then one day this dry stick will be full of green leaves and flowers." The Jubaraj's men brought Thoibi to Tamoo and sold her to one Kapa. She was engaged in gathering wood and selling fish. The day used to pass in activity.

But as the night fell memories of his father and mother, relatives and friends and specially of her dear Khamba came rolling down and tormented her heart. Eyes forgot sleep. Tears flew in stream, yet her heart was not consoled. As usual, with heavy heart, she used to go out at day break to resume her daily work.

Within a few days the Jubraj came to his senses. Realising the distress of his daughter his heart was softened. His men went to bring her back. Kangjamba went a long way on horse back to receive her. He was extremely delighted to have the privilege of greeting her first. Thoibi found it to be the right moment to get the horse from him. By some charming words she completely outwitted him. Without any suspicion Kangjamba gladly lent his horse to Thoibi who then to his great disappointment rode straight to Khamba's house.

Next day, an old man came to the king and reported that a large tiger was creating disturbances near his house. The king announced that he would offer Thoibi to the person who would be able to kill that tiger. On hearing this both Khamba and Kangjamba came forward. They hurled their spears simultaneously. Both missed and the tiger at once jumped upon Kangjamba and tore his body to pieces. Khamba then again threw another spear. This time it hit its mark. The injured tiger began to withdraw into the forest. Khamba followed it and again drew out a spear and hurled at it in correct aim. This time it hit the tiger and it fell dead on the ground. He then came out of the forest with the tiger on his shoulder and greeted the king. The king became extremely pleased with him and presented him many valuable articles including some salt wells. The days of Khamba's miseries and sorrows were over. He gave his sister Khamnu to a suitable person. His own marriage with Thoibi was also solemnised with due pomp and grandeur. Thoibi went to the house of Khamba and began to live in peace and happiness.

But by the irony of fate they were not destined to enjoy that happiness for a long time. Khamba grew suspicious about the sincerity of Thoibi's love. In order to get rid of that suspicion he decided to make a test of it. One night without her knowledge he thrust a stick into the house of Thoibi from outside. Had she really been faithless she could easily go out at this

signal and satisfy her desire by the man waiting outside. But Thoibi entirely dedicated herself to Khamba. She became furious against the person who tried to seduce her. She drew out the spear of Khamba from the shelf and through the hole of the wall thrust it in the chest of the miscreant. At once she heard the voice of Khamba crying in agony 'Thoibi ! Thoibi ! !' She ran out and found all was over by that time. She gently drew out that spear from the chest of her beloved and thrust it into her own. All doubts and sorrows came to an end. Death enveloped the two lovers in eternal peace.

CONCLUSION OF THE STORY OF MOIRANG

Since the death of Chinkhu Telheiba the account of Moirang is very brief. This is due to the rise of the Meitei community. At about 1431 A.D. the Meitei king defeated and killed the chief of Moirang at Moirang Khong. The heads of the soldiers of Moirang who were killed in the battle were engraved there. It is reported that Maharaj Chandra Kirti Singh dislodged a chief of Moirang. Since that time for 27 years there was no chief of Moirang. In 1892 the British Political Agent appointed Ramananda Singh as the chief of Moirang. Moirang lost her political importance long ago. But in the cultural history of Manipur her contribution is no less important than that of Imphal. The old customs and religion of Moirang are still alive. God Thangjing is still being worshipped. Above all, the story of Khamba and Thoibi represented in dance and dramas, receives widest appreciation all over Manipur.

CHAPTER III

THE UNACCOUNTED PERIOD (*8th to 18th Century*)

FOR one thousand years, from the 8th to the 18th century, the history of Manipur has not been properly accounted for. It may be a difficult task to reconstruct the history of this period but the effort put to it will not be totally useless. The general history of India as we read today is the outcome of the researches by hundreds of scholars carried on for over a century. Yet we find lack of uniform attention and adequate treatment in different parts and periods of Indian History. Until recently writers of Indian history had North Indian bias. Other parts of India did not receive so much attention as received by Northern India. Even in the history of Northern India there is no proper account of the periods viz., from the fall of the Kushans to the rise of the Guptas and from the fall of the Guptas to the rise of Harsha. Regarding the history of Assam from the death of Vashkar Varma in 650 A.D. to the coming of the Ahoms in 1228 A.D., we are still in the dark. Histories of Bengal and Orissa had been written very recently. In spite of many defects, the work of the reconstruction of the history of India has gone much ahead. After long and laborious efforts of numerous historians we are now fairly acquainted with the Aryan and Dravidian contributions in Indian Civilization. But regarding the Mongolian contribution very little light has been thrown. Fortunately the work done by some British authors in this field has attracted the attention of the Indian historians.

In view of this picture, the reconstruction of the forgotten chapters of the history of Manipur for nearly one thousand years should not appear to be an impossible task. The work may be begun with the materials that have so far been collected. No history of any country has been reconstructed by the effort of a single individual or in one attempt. The scope of finding

new facts, correction of errors revision and new interpretation always remains. Several varieties of coins circulated by different rulers have been found in Manipur. The oldest of them is said to be circulated by Pakhangba. Others were circulated by Maranba (1256 A.D.) Khagemba, Paikhomba (1666 A.D.), Charairongba (1697 A.D.). Many important objects have been unearthed, as a result of the excavation of the Kameng area, where the Chinese prisoners were allowed to settle. Excavations carried on at other places also brought to light 20 notable historical objects including stone-images, stone-tablets and inscriptions on copper plates. Of the stone tablets one belongs to Khagemba and the other to Charairongba. Copper plates are mainly in connection with grants of lands. The oldest of them belongs to Khongtekcha (849 A.D.). It gives us some idea of the then political condition and religious beliefs. There are also some manuscripts. These objects and manuscripts are the important sources of information for that period of the history of Manipur.

The tribes which played prominent part in the formation of the Manipur Society and State are Khumal, Luang, Moirang and Meitei. The Meitei began to spread their influence over the rest when the glory of Moirang declined. In course of time all these tribes merged with the Meitei and formed a greater Meitei community.

Prior to the 8th Century very little information is available about the history of Manipur. The Puranas refer to the names of only ten rulers of that period. But no definite information is available regarding their reigns and places of residence. From the 8th century till the succession of Gharib Niwaz (1714 A.D.) we get the names of 36 rulers, each of whom might have ruled on the average for 28 years. This is a very reasonable calculation, and on this basis the history of this one thousand years may be fairly reconstructed. At about 700 A.D King Konthouiba was the ruler of Manipur. He enjoyed undisturbed rule for five years. At that time a great person named 'Poireiton' entered into Manipur from the West. The 'Puranas' refer to another 'Poireiton' who also came long before him and lit up for the first time the sacrificial fire. In course of time his followers got mixed up with the local people and lost their ideal and identity. The second 'Poireiton' again lit up that fire at Andro behind

the Nongmaijing hill, 8 miles away from Imphal. He was ambitious and wanted to capture the ruling power by his spiritual force. But when he actually proceeded towards the 'Kangla' he was prevented by a supernatural force. Since then 'Kangla' came to be known as 'Inthafal'. In the puranas of Manipur there are several stories regarding the coming of 'Guru' and 'Poireiton'. 'Poireiton' seems to be the corruption of the word 'Purohit' (Brahmin-priest). Probably these 'Guru' and 'Poireiton' were the missionaries of Aryan culture in Manipur in that early period.

Konthouba was succeeded by Naethingkhong in 750 A.D. The most important incident of his reign is the fight against a Naga community called Angom. The fighting with any of the Naga communities is almost a perpetual feature of the history of Manipur. There might be stray cases in which a Naga entered into the Manipuri community but in general the Nagas maintained their separate cultural identity. Politically also the rulers of Manipur failed to enjoy unqualified allegiance from them. They would not hesitate to exploit any opportunity to rise against the Manipuri king. During the reign of Naethingkhong, one day one of his chief followers was severely injured by an Angom. As a result the whole community was severely chastised by the Manipuri forces¹.

Pemberton reports that Manipur was visited by Samlong Pha, brother of the king of Pong, towards the close of the 8th century A.D. He had been on a raiding expedition through Cachar and Tripura, and descended into the valley near Moirang, a village on the western shore of the Loktak Lake. He ordered the people of Moirang to make a yearly offering to the local gods, and visited the Meiteis, who were not assessed to tribute but were ordered to dress more decently and to chew 'pan' in place of the pieces of dried fish they had formerly affected². This invasion is, however, generally assigned to the 13th century, A.D. According to the Shan chronicles, the brother of a king of Mungman who ascended the throne in 1220 A.D. gained several notable victories in Upper Assam, where he defeated the Chutiyas, as well as the people in Arakan, Manipur and other countries³. A section of the Ahoms occupied the northern and eastern hill tracts of upper Burma and western Yunnan, where they formed

a group of states. The most important of them called Mungman was known to the Manipuris as Pong⁴.

The chronicles of Ava and Shan, local literature and customs indicate the invasion of Manipur by the rulers of Ava and Pong times without number. But history has no record of these invasions till the 18th century. Due to these constant non-Aryan invasions the Aryan culture in Manipur became nearly lifeless. Naethingkhong was succeeded by Khongtekcha. One copper plate issued by him has been discovered. Some religious changes are indicated in the context of that copper plate. It mentions the existence of 363 gods; of them Hari is the supreme. Special stress is laid on the worship of Shiva and Durga. But in the old manuscripts of Manipur there is reference to only 9 gods. Such increase in the number of Gods must have been due to the influence of the Hindu mythology. Changes are noticed also in the materials as well as in the incantations for worship. Gods were no longer fond of beef like Thangjing of Moirang. They could be satisfied with the offerings of fishes, sweetmeat, leaves of peepul tree, etc. The formula of worship was *i, i, i, soha, soha*. This *soha* probably is the corruption of the Vedic 'Swaha'. The king began to be looked upon as the god incarnate. His consort was a goddess. Gods used to enter into the wombs of these Goddesses and were born as princes. The king very often used to seek the advice of gods. His swords were made of gold and silver and on his head he used to put on a nine-storied umbrella. His 'doolie' was named 'Pushpamahamanik'. Vassal kings paid him tribute. The king had one spiritual guide and some astrologers. After the death of king his soul passing through 'Shivaloka' finally reached 'Baikuntha'. All these beliefs and customs smack of Hindu Purana.

After Khongtekcha we find the names of two rulers Keiremba (880 A.D.) and Yaraba (949 A.D.). During the period of Yaraba (949 A.D.) the Khuman chief grew very powerful and occupied a considerable portion of Manipur. For some time Yaraba's authority remained totally eclipsed. The Khuman chief established his headquarters at Mayang Imphal. Till that time the Khumans had the custom of human sacrifice. Once, seven 'lalaies' (heroes) of the Khumans went out in search of a suitable person for sacrifice, and came to the house of the 'Senapati' of Moirang. The 'Senapati' was at that time not

in his house and in his absence the 'lalaies' took away his wife. When he came to know of it he pursued the Khuman 'lalaies' and killed six of them. After that incident the supremacy of the Khumans began to decline. After Yarava the following names are found in the list of the ruling chiefs of Manipur. Ayangba (968 A.D.), Ningthoucheng (987 A.D.), Chengloipam Lanthaba (1007 A.D.), Yunglaw Keiphaba (1027 A.D.), Irengba (1107 A.D.), Loyamba (1127 A.D.), Loitongba (1154 A.D.), Hematowi Wanhaba (1170 A.D.). There is no mention of any notable incident during the period of their reigns. After these eight rulers we come across the name of Thawan Thaba (1199 A.D.). During his reign a naval battle took place with the Khumans in the Loktak Lake. The Manipuri festival Hiyangharel or boat-race bears the memory of that battle even today.

Thawanhaba was followed by Chingthang Lanthaba (1211 A.D.), Puranhaba (1226 A.D.) and Khumbomba (1236 A.D.)⁶. No important incident is found during this period except the invasion of Manipur by the ruler of Pong in 1220 A.D.

Colonel Johnstone has made a reference to the invasion of Manipur by a Chinese force and their defeat in 1250 A.D. by the ruler of Manipur. The Chinese prisoners were allowed to settle at a place called Susa Kameng. Their descendants are still living as a Loi community, in the Kameng village, 9 miles away from Imphal by the side of the Dimapur road. These Chinese prisoners for the first time introduced silk-weaving and brick-laying in Manipur. Once 'Kamen Chatpa dhoti', a kind of white silk 'dhoti' with purple patterns and scrolls stamped on it by means of wooden blocks made by the people of that Kameng village was very popular in Manipur⁷.

In Manipuri language the use of the word Kameng is very rare. It is generally used in connection with the Kameng village only. In the manuscripts, Poireiton Khunthokpa it is found that in the site of the Kameng village there was the fort of the Luangs. There is no mention of Kameng in that manuscript. In the excavation conducted by W. Yumjao Singh at a place, Langol Chingoiro, a manuscript of the 17th century has been found. The earliest mention of Kameng is found in that manuscript. Hence it is quite probable that Kameng is a foreign word and the settlers of that village are of foreign extraction. The study of the findings of Kameng also leads to that conclusion.

Regarding the date of the Chinese invasion others do not agree with Johnstone. According to Hodson, the Chinese army entered Manipur during the reign of Khagembra at about 1630 A.D. Bijoy Panchali informs us that at about 1564, Peyangu, a Chinese king sent his general Moyodana with a force to invade Manipur. Mongyamba, the father of Khagembra, was then the ruler of Manipur. But the Chinese king was not very satisfied with his general and wanted his destruction. He separately communicated his intention to the ruler of Manipur. In the engagement that took place, Moyodana was killed and his forces were completely defeated. The Chinese king was very much pleased at it and paid a visit to the ruler of Manipur with rich presents. The prisoners were settled in a new village called Khagempalli. To commemorate this victory Mongyamba named his new born son Khagembra. The Chinese settlers were at first Buddhists. Later on they accepted the religion of the Manipuris.

The approximate date of the Chinese invasion in Manipur is difficult to determine. Gap between the dates given by Hodson and Bijoy Panchali though may be reconciled, still the date given by Johnstone remains a problem. For it goes nearly 350 years back. In this connection another point remains to be settled. To which king actually goes the credit of defeating the Chinese force? According to Hodson it is Khagembra. In Manipur 'Khagi' means China and 'Yamba' means to kill. Hence Khagembra must be the person who defeated the Chinese. Bijoy Panchali gives the credit of victory to Mongyamba, the father of Khagembra. But it is surprising that Mongyamba instead of using the name himself gave it to his son. Hence there is reason to believe that 'Khagembra' instead of becoming a proper name of a ruler might have been used as a title like 'Sakari Vikramiditya'. It is not improbable that some rulers of Manipur used that title in the 13th century by repelling a Chinese invasion. Following him other victorious rulers of Manipur also used that title up to the 17th century. It is very difficult to accept the accounts given by Bijoy Panchali as authentic because the author of Bijoy Panchali does not offer a very good sense of proportion regarding time and place.

Khagembra was succeeded by Marangba. He struck a kind of small and round coin.. The names of persons who ruled in Manipur during the 14th century are stated to be Thangbi

Lanthaba, Kongyamba, Telheiba, Tabungba and Ningthou Khomba. Ningthou Khomba's reign extended up to the beginning of the 15th century. Once he proceeded to the east to resist an invading Burmese force. In his absence the Tangkhuls came down from the hills and attacked the unprotected capital. Queen Linthoi-Ngambi with other women heroically fought against them and eventually succeeded in driving them away. Ningthou Khomba was succeeded by Kyamba. He also struck coins. After ascending the throne he went out for conquests. It is said that he subjugated the entire land from Moran to Lushai hills. For the purpose of administration he divided the Manipur Valley into 4 panas, viz., Ahallup, Naharup, Khabam and Laipham. Rest of India was then under Muslim rule. Many Brahmins of the neighbouring Muslim state entered into Manipur at that time. Ancestors of Adhikarimayum, Laihao-thabam, Sijagurumayum, Kakchingtabam, Phurailatpam and Aribam families came to Manipur in that period. Kyamba introduced the festival of Cheiraoba at about 1485 A.D. Cheiraoba is often confused with the Charak festival; but in fact there is no connection between the two, except coincidence of time and similarity in names.

At about 1475 A.D. the strength and influence of Manipur state increased to a considerable extent. The ruler of Pong proposed to marry a daughter of the king of Manipur. On her way to Pong she was carried off by the Raja of Khumbat but he was promptly attacked and conquered by the combined forces of Pong and Manipur.

His territories were made over to the Meitei chief, and the valley was visited by the Pong king who directed that the old form of Naga house should be abandoned and the so-called 'long lined house' should be adopted in its stead. He also presented the Raja with a golden pandhan, a silver mounted dao, and a litter, which, with a sacred spear, were for many years the insignia of royalty. The last of these articles, the golden pandhan disappeared in 1850, when it was carried off by Raja Debendra Singh⁸.

Ahom Buranji records the existence of contact between Manipur and Assam within the period between 1497 A.D. to 1539 A.D. At about 1538 A.D. the Ahom ruler Chaopha Shuhummung (Dihingia Raja) gave a girl of the Lanmakhu

family, named Khukdang, to Chaomen, the ruler of Manipur, Chaomen also exchanged a princess and presents with Dihingia Raja⁹.

In the 16th century we come across the following list of rulers viz—Keirengba, Langaingmba, Ngaiphaba, Kahomba, Atongjamba, Chalamba and Mungyamba. Mungyamba has been discussed in connection with the Chinese invasion. In the history of Cooch-Bihar it is found that the Koch King Nara Narayan after defeating the rulers of Assam and Cachar in 1562 demanded tribute from the ruler of Manipur. The ruler of Manipur had not at that time the sufficient strength to defy the victorious Koch King. He submitted without any protest and offered Rs. 20,000,300 gold coins and 10 elephants¹⁰.

According to the calculation of Bijoy Panchali the reign of Khagembra falls in the beginning of the 17th century. His victory over the Chinese force has been sufficiently discussed. He divided his kingdom into 8 divisions. ‘Lallup’ or obligatory service to the ruler by every subject is said to have been introduced by him. He made the system of measuring lands and weighing goods.

Once Sanatan, a brother of Khagembra, with the help of his brother-in-law, the ruler of Cachar, invaded Manipur and proceeded up to Laimaton. But he was defeated and killed by Khagembra. Among the prisoners there were many Muslims and low-caste Hindus. They settled in Manipur. Khagembra built a temple in Bishnupur. It is said that he constructed a palace at Langthabal. The relationship between Tripura and Manipur at the time of Khagembra is not known. Bijoy Panchali mentions that some people from ‘Takhel’ came to Manipur at that time to pay tribute. At that time Tripura was known to the Manipuris as ‘Takhel’ because it is situated in the south of Manipur. The ancestors of the Brahmin families viz., Aribam-Sagoloi-Latpam, Samurai-Latpam, Thongrathabam and Hidangmayum etc. entered into Manipur during this period¹¹.

After Khagembra, these kings, Khunjaoba, Paikhomba and Charairongba ruled successively. Coins struck by Paikhomba and Charairongba respectively have been found. The son of Charairongba is Pamheiba, alias Gharib Niwaz, the most powerful ruler of Manipur who effected a great religious reformation in the country.

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CHAPTER IV

GHARIB NIWAZ PAMHEIBA

THE beginning of the 18th Century saw the dawn of a new era in the history of Manipur. When the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 A.D. left India in a state of political chaos, the dark cloud overshadowing the political horizon of Manipur gradually became clear. Though India has nothing to be proud of the new century, it has at least added a bright chapter of the history of Manipur to the history of India. Those who are engaged in reconstructing the history of Manipur find their task easier from this period. They have no longer to grope mostly in the catacomb of myths and legends. Reliable materials in increasing quantity are available from this time. Manipur was waiting for a strong and able guide to bring her latent energy to fruition. It was at this time that Gharib Niwaz Pamheiba with a revolutionary outlook and the zeal of a conqueror, comparable to that of Emperor Harshabardhana, assumed the political leadership of Manipur. In one hand he carried his victorious arms to the imperial city of Ava and in the other he effected a religious revolution within his own country.

His activities paved the way to rapid cultural integration of Manipur with the rest of India. Had the people of Manipur not received the guidance of such an able personality they could not probably have reached their present higher level of culture than other backward communities in the neighbouring state.

According to Pemberton, Gharib Niwaz ascended the throne of Manipur in the year 1714 A.D.¹. But Bijoy Panchali gives the date of his accession as 1709². It is difficult to be accurate about it. Manipur enjoyed his rule approximately for 35 to 40 years. His reign did not extend to the second half of the 18th Century. But who is this mighty Vaishnava ruler and conqueror who styled himself as the refuge of the poor (Gharib Niwaz) and in whose character is found the rare combination of the

martial qualities of a Kshatriya and the humility of a Vaishnava? Gharib Niwaz Pamheiba is the successor of King Charairongba³. All sources point to his being brought up by a Naga Chief in the midst of a Naga Society. After ascending the throne also he showed his leanings towards Naga custom and costume. He celebrated the coronation ceremony putting on a Naga robe⁴. The Nagas (who form a community entirely different from the ruling clan) at last found to their great delight a king of their own.

But authorities are not unanimous regarding the parentage of Gharib Niwaz. British writers⁵ have identified him as the son of a Naga. There are many stories regarding the early life of Pamheiba current in the hills and plains of Manipur. According to a very popular anecdote he was really the son of king Charairongba borne by one of the queens, Nungshel Chaibi. A strong custom prevalent up to that time in the royal family of Manipur would not allow any son of the king borne except by the Chief queen to survive⁶. This was intended to prevent fratricidal war amongst the princes. Nungshel Chaibi, not being the chief queen, wanted to save her son from the cruel custom. In due course when the child was born she secretly sent him to the house of a Naga Chief in Laisangkhong, a village situated in the south of the Imphal Valley. The king was informed that the queen had given birth to a stone⁷. Pamheiba's royal birth is also corroborated by another story⁸ giving a different version. When the prince was in his mother's womb, the king one day consulted his astrologer regarding the fate of the child who, it was told, would be a parricide. Hence the king ordered the child to be murdered immediately after birth. The queen on hearing this terrible order secretly shifted the child after birth to the house of the above-mentioned Naga Chief with the help of her father. The king was told of the birth of a stone (instead of a male child). When Pamheiba was four years old, the chief queen heard of his existence and sent assassins secretly to kill him. The boy's maternal grandfather escaped with him to the Thangal Village inhabited by the Quiron tribe of the Nagas. In the meantime many years passed away, but king Charairongba had no other son. The father in him was longing for a son. Once he with his retinue visited the Thangal village for collection of taxes and was accorded suitable reception by his subjects.

While staying in that village he noticed a very beautiful boy in the company of other boys of the village. He expressed his desire to adopt him. The villagers willingly consented to the wish of the king. Forsaken at the time of birth, Pamheiba was thus restored to the palace again. When the boy grew up into manhood the king proposed to Haobam Selungba, a member of his councils, to give his daughter in marriage with Pamheiba. Selungba fell in a dilemma. He was not willing to give his daughter to a person of unknown parentage but at the same time was afraid to disregard the king's proposal. At this time Pamheiba's mother somehow came to know of the situation, and one day disclosed the identity of the prince both to Selungba and the king. The king was much pleased to hear it and Selungba also after that could have no objection to give his daughter to Pamheiba. Another version concludes the same story in a different way. Many years passed since the birth of Pamheiba and none of the queens showed any expectations of child birth. "The Raja was unaware up to this time of the existence of Pamheiba although he had a suspicion of the fact. He made a declaration before all his wives that if any of them had concealed a male child, they would be freely forgiven and the child made his heir. The mother of Pamheiba promised to make enquiries if the Raja promised that no harm should befall the child. On his doing so she confessed the existence of Pamheiba. The boy was sent for and acknowledged by the Raja and people as the son of Charairongba"⁹. Afterwards when Pamheiba ascended the throne he assumed the title of "Gharib Niwaz".

The word "Gharib Niwaz" has been derived by the writer of Bijoy Panchali¹⁰ as "Karigumba Nawa" which means the assumption of the throne by a prince who was once lost. This interpretation if accepted, also suggests the royal parentage of Pamheiba. But Khongnanghaba refused to recognise Pamheiba as Kshatriya and proclaimed him of a Naga descent¹¹. His denunciation of Pamheiba's royal parentage may not be taken as authentic because he was a strong opponent of the changes made as Pamheiba in religious matters. Shantidas Adhikari, a Vaishnava missionary and preceptor of the king, confirmed that Pamheiba undoubtedly belonged to the royal family of Manipur, in the veins of which is flowing the blood of the third Pandava Arjun, one of the heroes of the Mahabharata¹². To

prove one's parentage, specially after a gap of long two centuries is an intricate task. There are instances in history of powerful kings claiming noble descent. The Rajput princes trace their origin from Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama. Shivaji at the time of his coronation traced his connection on the father's side from the Ranas of Udaipur, a claim which found ready support of the Pundits enjoying his favour. The only strong point in favour of Pamheiba's royal origin is that he was recognised by the ruling clan as their king. Had he really been a Naga boy, his succession would not have gone unchallenged. Bijoy Panchali records the rise of a particular Naga community of the south called the Too-sook during the end of Charairongba's rule. The rebels led by Lalamba proceeded up to Kharam. All the officers of the king were successively defeated by the Nagas. At this crucial hour the king, disregarding the forewarning of the astrologer, himself led his forces against the rebels. An intrigue was already afoot within the royal family. Selungba, the father-in-law of Pamheiba, always had an apprehension, lest the king at the counsel of other queens and partisans should change his mind regarding the succession of Pamheiba. He got his son-in-law interested in the plot. Too-sook rebellion might not have been engineered by Selungba but it undoubtedly gave him an opportunity for his design. The King completely defeated the Too-sooks and killed Lalamba. After the battle while he was resting on the bank of the Nambul river, a thunder fell with terrific sound within close proximity. Tired as he was, he fell fainted. Selungba saw his chance and thrust his spear on the person of the king. The king was mortally wounded but did not succumb then and there. When he regained consciousness, his body-guards told him about the act of Selungba. He was quick to understand the motive. But it was too late. Death was fast approaching. He called in Pamheiba by his side, cursed him for his misdeed and then handed over to him the royal insignia. Before he breathed his last Charairongba entrusted upon his son the task of taking revenge upon Taningangwe¹³, the ruler of Bu-ma of Toungoo dynasty (1714-1733)¹⁴ for his maltreatment to his wife Makhaobhangbe, the younger sister of Pamheiba¹⁵. T.C. Hodson heard a different story about the death of Charairongba. He was killed by a poisoned arrow while in fighting a tribe to the south called Too-sook upon which

Pamheiba, "better known by his Hindoo name of Gharib Niwaz", ascended the guddee¹⁶. Dr. Brown gives the following version of the facts as given to him, "In that year (1714) Pamheiba, who appears to have been a Naga boy brought up and adopted by the Raja Churai Romba, shot his adopted father, it is said, accidentally whilst hunting and succeeded him"¹⁷.

Pamheiba ascended the throne and assumed the title of Gharib Niwaz. All Naga chiefs were invited at the coronation ceremony. The ministers and officials of Manipur received the Naga chiefs, made friendship and intimacy with them. The Raja entertained the Naga Chiefs with good feasts and wine¹⁸. Outside Manipur the title Gharib Niwaz became more popular than the real name. "Gharib Niwaz", derived from "Karigumba Nawa", meaning lost prince ascending the throne, does not offer a satisfactory cause for its being chosen as a title by the king like Pamheiba. The above meaning only signifies the game of fate. It speaks neither the glory nor suggests any ideal of the owner. On the other hand there is no reason to rule out its source from Persian. In Persian Gharib Niwaz means kind to the poor. In the beginning of the 18th century, when the major portion of Eastern India was still under Muslim domination, percolation of a Persian word Gharib Niwaz into Manipur through the hills and becoming favourite of her powerful king is not at all an impossibility. For even to day, long after Muslim rule, the Muslim titles like Dewan, Munshi, Mazumdar, Bahadur etc. are found very common among the aristocrats of the neighbouring states, both Hindus and Muslims alike. In the history of ancient India it is found that centuries after the disappearance of Achaemenian Empire of Persia assumption of the Persian title "Satrap" used to be considered as a matter of pride by non-Persian rulers of Western India. Just as in spite of being a separate state, Manipur was not free from the influence of Vaishnava movement in India. Similarly the influence of Islamic civilization might not have left her completely untouched. In the year 1667 the eastern boundary of the Mughal empire under the generalship of Mir Jumla extended as far as the Darrang district in Assam. Sylhet and part of Cachar district continued to be ruled by Muslim Amirs appointed by the Nawab of Dacca till 1765 A.D. Muslim traders, artisans and labourers began to enter into Manipur long before the time of Gharib Niwaz. In

"The Background of Assamese Culture" Mr. R. M. Nath writes : "Gopal Singh ascended the throne of Manipur in 1709 A.D. at the age of 20 and assumed the surname Gharib Niwaz, a honorific epithet given to him by the Emperor of Delhi"¹⁹. But he has not given any clue to the source of his information. Whatever it may be, through religion and commerce Manipur undoubtedly maintained connections with the neighbouring Muslim province at the time of Gharib Niwaz. Hence there can be little doubt that the word Gharib Niwaz used by Pamheiba belongs to the Persian vocabulary.

The relation between Burma and Manipur used to remain far from friendly most of the time. The Burmese army ravaged Manipur times without number. Our first record of those invasions dates back to 1562 A.D.²⁰ when Bayinnaung the most powerful ruler of the Toungoo dynasty, reduced Manipur to a tributary State²¹. But subsequently she asserted her independence and even made occasional raids on the Burmese territory. There were truces also which were followed by matrimonial alliances. Perhaps one such matrimonial alliance took place during the time of Charairongba. But that it was not a very happy one, has already been noticed. In the year 1725 Gharib Niwaz was able to make the first of his series of raids against the kingdom of Burma. He attacked and defeated a Burmese force at the mouth of the Haglung river. In the following year the Burmese tried to retaliate. An army of 30,000 men penetrated into the valley, but were finally repulsed. Three entire divisions were captured by the forces of Manipur²².

Taniganwe (1714-33) the king of Burma expressed his desire to make peace. Mahanta Bakridas, a disciple of the Vaishnava missionary Shantidas, was sent to the Burmese court as plenipotentiary to the king of Manipur. Taniganwe, though defeated he was, expressed his desire to have the princess Satyamala, the daughter of Gharib Niwaz as his wife. Gharib Niwaz though offended kept up appearances. The Burmese king was informed that Satyamala would be presented to him three days after the spring festival (Basanta Panchami). Quite ignorant of the real design of the King of Manipur, Taniganwe made all preparations for the ensuing marriage ceremony. Instead of the bride's party the army of Manipur suddenly fell upon the royal camp and made a terrible massacre²³. In the

year 1935 Gharib Niwaz; crossed Ningthee river, attacked and destroyed the town of Myedoo, on the bank of the Moc river and carried away numerous captives. During the two subsequent years he defeated two Burmese armies numbering to 7,000 foot, 700 horse and 20 elephants and devastated the whole country from the bank of the Khondoung Khyoung to Deebayean. In the year 1738, he again crossed the Ningthee river attacked and dispersed the Burmese armies numbering to 15,000 foot, 3000 horse and 30 elephants. In the same year after the rainy season "Gharib Niwaz at the head of 20,000 men marched between the Burmese army, 3 divisions of which occupied the towns of Mutseng, Deebayen and Myedoo and to use the language of the Burmese historian 'without stopping' attacked and carried the stockaded positions around the ancient capital of Zakaing, of which he obtained possessions".* "Religious fanaticism appears to have stimulated the Muneepoorees to this last act of successful daring; for the Burmese Chronicles record the name of a Brahmin, who is said to have assured them, that they would be preserved from all evil by drinking and bathing in the water of the Irrawathee river at Saging."²⁴

During these years the Toungoo dynasty was represented by two weak kings Tanninganwe (1714-33) and Mahadamma Yaza Dipati (1733-1752). These kings rarely left the capital surrounded by all the jealousies and intrigues of harem life they became practically palace prisoners. Law and order was practically non-existent in the dominions. Adventurers were always ready to throw off their allegiance and make profit out of the situation. At the time of Bayinnanng's reign lower Burma was devastated by the exodus of thousands of Mons. The weakness of the Ava kingship was so obvious that there was bound to come a time when the Mons would dream of restoring the old kingdom of Pegu²⁵.

Gharib Niwaz, the ruler of the trans-Chindwin State of Manipur must have been aware of the condition of his neighbour and laid bare the weakness of Ava. In 1739 he, aided, it is said, by the Cacharees, invaded Ava with a force of 20,000 men,

*The old door of the eastern entrance to the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda still bears marks said to have been made by the sword of Gharib Niwaz as he forced his way to slaughter its garrison (Burma—Hall, P. 75).

but failed to capture a stockaded Burmese post at Myedoo. He suffered a heavy loss and was deserted by his allies²⁶.

Bijoy Panchali records that taking advantage of the commitments of the king of Manipur in Burma a Tripuri king invaded Manipur from the west and advanced as far as Moirang in 1739. Safety of the country was foremost in Gharib Niwaz's mind. So it was considered unwise to maintain two fronts. He concluded peace with the Burmese king offering his daughter Satyamala and hurried back to Manipur²⁷. Tripuri forces were, of course, easily driven out. But he remained inactive on the eastern frontier until 1749 A.D.²⁸.

After a long gap of ten years Gharib Niwaz again crossed the Ningthee river in 1749 with 2000 men and 300 horses encamped near the confluence of the Kyendwen and Irrawathee river waiting for a favourable opportunity to cross the Irrawathee and make an attack on the capital Ava. The Burmese king also mustered all his forces to oppose him. Just at this time a trifling incident caused Gharib Niwaz to change his mind. One night his standard was blown down. Taking it to be a bad omen he preferred to make peace. On his return journey he was harassed by the Koe tribe near the Moo river. On reaching the mouth of the Maglun river he was met by Ajit Shah alias Kakeelalhaba and was rebuked by him for the unsuccessful termination of his expedition. These remonstrances produced so strong a feeling of disaffection among the troops, that Gharib Niwaz was deserted by all but 500 men. With them he went back to Ava this time soliciting help from the Burmese king against his rebellious son. He resided for a short time at Tsengain and gave another daughter in marriage to Tanninganwe. But no help could be given due to the rise of the Peguers in the south. He stayed there until Ava was destroyed by the rebel Peguers. Finding no help in Burma he made an attempt to re-enter Manipur. At the mouth of Maglun river, he was met by the emissaries of Ajit Shah and was cruelly murdered together with his eldest son Sham Shah and all the principal men of the court who followed Gharib Niwaz²⁹.

Bijoy Panchali gives a slightly different version of his death. Gharib Niwaz had two queens. By the eldest queen he had a son called Shyam Shah. Shyam Shah had two sons—Gour Shah and Jai Singh. By the second wife he had six sons,

Ajit Shah, Nun Shah, Tong Shah, Sarbosachee, Bharat Shah and Shatrughana Shah³⁰. By this time the old custom of allowing only the sons of the Chief Queen to survive had been abolished³¹. Once Gharib Niwaz at the request of his younger queen nominated Ajit Shah as his successor superseding the eldest son Shyam Shah. While he had been to Burma for the last time and concluded peace with the Burmese ruler, a rumour spread in Manipur that Gharib Niwaz had changed his mind in favour of Shyam Shah regarding the succession to the throne. On hearing this, Ajit at the instance of his mother, sent a force to Burma under an officer, Tolentomba. Tolentomba implored the old king to come back to Manipur. He agreed and proceeded along with him. At that time Shyam Shah, Santidas, the Vaishnava preacher and 17 other of his followers were in his party. On the way, they were treacherously murdered at the instance of Tolentomba.

As a king Gharib Niwaz's energy was not completely used up in the expeditions against Burma. The images of Ramji and Hanumanji were installed by him in two separate temples of which that of Hanumanji was made of brick. Of his other philanthropic acts, mention may be made of the construction of the Ningthem Pukhari (tank) at Wangkhei Leikai³². The size of the tank reflect to some extent the greatness of the king. Among the literary activities it is mentioned that Bijoy Panchali was rewritten by Dwija Sita Ram Sarma, a chronicler in the court of Gharib Niwaz³³.

Almost all the accounts of Manipur refer to the spread of Brahmanical Vaishnavism on a wide scale in Manipur under the royal patronage of Gharib Niwaz. Baptized by the Vaishnava missionary, Shantidas Adhikary, he declared Vaishnavism as the state religion and advised his subjects to accept it. In view of the rapid progress of Vaishnavism, the champion of the old faith, Khongnangthaba with his followers, tried to stem the tide. The account of this event given by the local pundits ends with a tragic conclusion. The king enraged by the opposition, ordered all the scriptures of the old religion to be burnt. Manipur to-day is thus deprived of her valuable religious and historical literatures of old due to religious fanaticism of the king³⁴.

The association of Ghabib Niwaz with Brahmin Vaishnava

missionaries has been revealed to us by Lieut. Colonel Burney from the original Burmese sources. Gharib Niwaz's devotion to Lord Rama is proved by his perpetuation of the image of Rama. All these information suggest Gharib Niwaz's acceptance of Vaishnava faith. But so far no evidence has been found regarding the burning of old scriptures and suppression of the old faith. In this connection it may be pointed out that human civilization has no record of any such religious order dictated by the monarch and accepted by the masses. Ajatsatru, for example, tried in vain to efface Buddhism from Magadha. Emperor Asoka employed all his resources for the propagation of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Ajivikas and other religious sects still continued to flourish within his empire. In later periods attempts of the Muslim and Christian rulers failed to convert whole of India into their respective faiths. Though China and Japan accepted Buddhism, the followers of Laotse, Confucius and Shintoism are not few in those centuries. All the churches have not been closed down under the anti-religious government of modern Russia. Exception is not found in Manipur also. Ancient gods and customs are also being duly attended to side by side with Vaishnavism. The temples of Thangjing at Moirang and Sena-meihi at Imphal show that the old faith is not dead. Maibas and Maibies in every village are still regulating the old customs and performing the old rites. The rapturous feeling noticed in the community dance of animal festivals like Chirouba amply testify that the old faith is not only alive but going strong. Brahmanical Vaishnavism also has failed to vivisect the Manipuri society into water-tight compartments of rigid caste system.

Gharib Niwaz entering into the Ramanandi order of Vaishnavism through Shantidas, must have patronised this new faith to spread among his subjects. Later on when the school of Gauranga Mahaprabhu was introduced Ramanandi school did not vanish altogether.

The temple of Ramji and the custom of putting special white turban by the Manipuris on ceremonial occasions indicate even to-day the influence of Ramanandi cult.

Nothing is known about the Life of Vaishnava missionary mahanta Shantidas Adhikari (Goswami) before his arrival in Manipur. Local accounts refer to his arrival from Sylhet³⁵.

He might have entered Manipur from sylhet side, but there is very little probability of his belonging to sylhet. After the advent of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal, Ramananda had few followers on this side. Specially Sylhet being the ancestral home of Shri Chaitanya undoubtedly came under the magical influence of that great personality. Lord Rama did not gain popularity in Bengal at any time, whereas the centre of Ramananda cult was at Varanasi and Lord Rama is still sovereign in the heart of the people of Northern India. Hence there are reasonable grounds to hesitate in coming to the conclusion that Shantidas came from Sylhet or any part of Bengal. However the rapid diffusion of Ramananda cult in Manipur speaks of Shantidas Adhikari's high spiritual attainments.

It is difficult to believe the elevation of Vaishnavism to the Status of State religion, purely due to the will of the monarch. In the historial period, politically Manipur was more in touch with Burma than with Cachar, Sylhet, Tripura and Assam. Shortly after the death of Gharib Niwaz, Burmese army entered and conquered Manipur (1758 A.D.) From 1758 A.D. to 1826 A.D.—within this period of 68 years Manipur was overrun and dominated by the Burmese, times without number. They must have tried to force their religion upon the people they conquered. An image of Buddha found in Manipur was probably imported during that period. Inspite of it Manipur did not accept Buddhism. Early association of Gharib Niwaz with the Nagas won for him a deep regard from that community. But his new religion had no influence upon the Nagas. On the other hand the Non-Nagas became out and out Vaishnavas. Hence it is difficult to accept the version that Gharib Niwaz at the instance of Shantidas burnt all the scriptures of old religion to make Vaishnavism acceptable to the Manipuris.

In connection with the spread of Vaishnavism in Manipur at the time of Gharib Niwaz a brief retracement of the histroy of Vaishnavism will further clarify the proposed contention. Vaishnavism, though it began to come to the lime-light in the modern period since the exposition of qualified monism by Ramanuja in the middle of the 11th centruy A.D., still it was not a new idea originated from him. The cult of Bhakti (devotion) is found in Indian religion even in the remote past. Its earliest form is known as "Aikantika Dharma". The Gita

serves for its philosophical basis. Vasudeva Krishna turned the attention of his followers from the dry and complete ritualism of the Vedas to the path of love and devotion. But even in the days of the Mahabharata sectarianism crept into this school and we come across different communities like 'Narayani', 'Pancharatra', 'Satta' etc. following the ideal of 'Bhakti'. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes noticed the existence of such religious communities in the 4th century B.C. In course of time Vaishnavism arose out of the Union of the two sects, Narayani and the worshippers of Vishnu. This Vaishnavism could not only survive through the palmy days of Buddhism in India during the periods of Asoka and Kanishka but also succeeded in enlisting foreign converts.

Heliodorus, a Greek envoy of Antialkidas, king of Taxila, to the court of a Sunga ruler Bhagabhadra professed the Bhagavata religion and set up a Garuda column at Besnagar in the honour of Vasudeva—in the second century B.C. In the 5th century A.D. the Gupta rulers used to assume the title of 'Parama Bhagabata'³⁶. After the death of Harshbardhana, Aditya Sena, one of the later Gupta rulers of Magadha, established a Vishnu temple at Gaya. In the 9th century A.D. Shankaracharya, the great exponent of Vedantic 'Advaitism', pointed out the philosophical hollowness of Buddhism. According to him the Universe instead of resting upon nothingness (suggested by the Buddhist philosophers), is, in fact, a super imposition on the Supreme Being, which is beyond all determination and who can be approached only through pure knowledge. In the 12th century Ramanuja attributing qualities to that Supreme Being infused new blood in the old but thin stream of Vaisnavism. Ramanuja's God can be approached through devotion (Bhakti). According to him God is the nearest and dearest friend of men. There is no scope for emotion either in Buddhism or in the Advaitism of Shankara. Human emotion so long did not find any approach to God. Qualified Monism of Ramanuja opened its gate towards God. In the wake of Ramanuja there followed Nimbarka, Madhavacharya and Ramananda. All of them were exponents of Vaishnavism. Ramananda (15th century A.D.) for the first time conceived Rama and Sita combined as the dual incarnation of Vishnu. He preached his 'Sita Rama' among all classes of people including Muslims. His Muslim disciple Kabir

preached that there is no difference between Rama and Rahim.

Vallabhacharya (1479 A.D.) was an important preacher of Krishna. According to him Radha was the chief disciple of Krishna and the ideal before the Vaishnava devotees. But some sections of the Vaishnavas failing to realise the inner meaning, degraded themselves in imitating the apparent relationship between Krishna and Radha. Instead of celibacy and sacrifice they plunged into sensual pleasure in the name of religion. In the 19th century Narayan Swami tried to rectify this perversion.

Contemporary of Vallabhacharya was Chaitanya (1479 A.D.). He also preached his God Krishna to all classes of people. Lord Krishna can be obtained, in his opinion, only through pure devotion and love. Radha resides in the heart saturated with intense love for Krishna. She has no material existence. The father of Chaitanya, his maternal grand-father and some of his chief disciples came from Sylhet. Even before the birth of Chaitanya, Sylhet was an important centre of Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism spread in Assam also under the spell of Shankar Deva (1449-1569 A.D.).

There was no royal support behind this Vaishnava movement—which influenced the Indian masses from the 11th century A.D. to the 16th century A.D. India was at that time ruled by the Muslim Kings who were interested in preaching Islam only. The Vaishnava missionaries everywhere preached their ideal through love. Charges like burning of others' canon or desecrating others' temples have not been heard so far against the Vaishnavas even from their direct enemies. On the other hand the history of Vaishnavism is shining with instances of bestowing love even to its enemies. It is quite probable that the waves of the Indian Vaishnava movement began to reach Manipur from at least the 15th century onward.

The ideal of love adored by the Manipuris in their popular anecdotes 'Nompok Ningthou' and 'Panthroibi', 'Khamba and Thoibi' found support in Vaishnavism. The legend of Arjuna's marriage with Chitrangada, princess of Manipur, if true, must have served a good background for the introduction of new Vaishnavism. Charaironghba, the father of Pamheiba, established a temple of Radha Krishna even before the coming of Shantidas. An earlier king Khagemba established a Vishbu temple at Vishnupur.

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CHAPTER V

AJIT SHAH, BHARAT SHAH, GOUR SHAH AND JAI SINGH

GHARIB Niwaz had seven sons. Of them Shyam Shah was born of the Chief queen, the rest Ajit Shah or Ugat Shah alias Kakilal Thaba, Nun Shah, Tong Shah, Sarbosache, Bharat Shah and Satrughna Shah were borne by the second queen¹. The account of the tragic end of Gharib Niwaz and Shyam Shah has already been given in the previous chapter. Ajit Shah had no difficulty to march straight to the throne. But in the fifth year of his reign² his complicity in the murder of his father and brother came to light. Bharat Shah had already formed a party and was waiting for an opportunity. When the people came to know about the dark deeds of his brother, he asked him to quit the country since "he abhorred the thought of dipping his hands in his brother's blood." Ajit Shah was reluctantly compelled to agree. Bharat Shah's action received the approval of the people and he was unanimously to take up the management of the state³. After two years of reign he died." "After a year and a half of his death the several Rajahs under the government of Meckley (31 in number) assembled to select his successors". "Shyam Shah the unfortunate eldest son of Gharib Niwaz had two sons, Gaur Shah and Chintung Komba aliases Jai Singh, Bhagyachandra Karta. The eldest Gaur Shah was unanimously chosen for the vacant throne and immediately proclaimed Rajah of Meckley about the year 1758⁴. Colonel McCullach says that "Gouoo Shyam was a cripple and it is related that considering himself from his infirmity unfit to be the sole ruler he associated with himself his brother Jai Singh or Chingtung Komba and that they ruled alternately; this arrangement lasted until Gouroo Sham's death about 1764, when the sole authority fell to Chingtung-Komba who held it up to 1798"⁵. Bijoy Panchali also records this arrangement of joint rule.

1764 TO 1798 A.D.

Jai Singh, the grand-son of Gharib Niwaz, stands second to his illustrious grand-father in order of merit in the history of Manipur. He was brave, intelligent and intensely religious. A considerable section of Rajkumars and Rajkumaris of Manipur claim their descent from Jai Singh. There are many stories about the heroism and popularity of Karta current in Manipur. All of them may not be accepted as historical facts, but materials for history will be found on them. It is said that during the reign of Gour Shah, Jai Singh one day in absence of the king ascended the 'Kangla'. According to the prevailing custom no person other than the reigning king had that right. When Gour Shah came to know of it he banished Jai Singh from the palace. Thus driven out from the palace he took shelter in the house of his maternal uncle Kheli-Nungwa Telheiba, the Chief of Moirang. The king then in order to get rid of Jai Singh forever, won over Telheiba to his side. Jai Singh scented it in time and left the palace at once in the guise of a Naga. At first he reached Thigomei (modern Kohima) through Maram. From there he entered Tekhao (Assam). Since the capital of Assam was situated at that time on the bank of the river Dikhu, the Manipuris used to call that kingdom as Tekhao. The enemies of Jai Singh followed him there. But Swargadeo (title of the ruler of Assam) having been pleased to see his wonderful tactics of taming wild elephant, promised to give him shelter. Henceforth he came to be known as Jai Singh. After some time he entered Manipur in the guise of a Kuki and reached first Moirang and then Bishnupur. He realised that in spite of his long absence his memory was still cherished by his countrymen. But he could not keep himself concealed in his Kuki garb for long. Shortly he was recognised and a large number of people began to rally round his banner. But before any outbreak of war the ailing Gour Shah died. Jai Singh ascended the 'Kangla' without any difficulty and was recognised as the ruler of Manipur⁶.

Manipur already weakened by the death of Gharib Niwaz, became weaker due to the disunity among his successors. Burma, her powerful neighbour, did not fail to exploit her weakness. From 1755 A.D. upto the treaty of Yandabo in 1826

A.D. the history of Manipur is replete with the story of successive Burmese invasions and of how she resisted them and eventually triumphed over them. Within the short period intervening Gharib Niwaz's death and the accession of Jai Singh Manipur was invaded twice by the Burmese.

In 1752 A.D. the Mons laid the final axe on the withered trunk of the ruling Tungoo dynasty. But they were not destined to rule over Burma. Alungpaya alias Alompra of Moksobomyo (the tower of the hunter chief) suddenly sprang into prominence as the Burmese national leader against the Mons. He drove out the Mons and established a new dynasty in Burma⁷. He soon consolidated his power in upper and lower Burma. The presumption of the sovereignty over Manipur by the rulers of Burma was always challenged. Alaungpaya secured of his hold over Burma, embarked on the project of expansion of the empire by conquering Manipur and Siam. Manipur, if she owed any allegiance to the ruler of Burma, undoubtedly had thrown off her yoke during the Civil War in Burma. Alaungpaya decided to re-establish it⁸. In the year 1755 he sent a punitive expedition under the command of a distant relation "to chastise the Cassayers (Manipuris)" which wrought such havoc that it is referred to in Manipuri records as the "Koolthan Kahalba" or primary destruction. The success of the Burmese force was mainly due to the superiority in fire-arms⁹. Manipur was reduced to submission. "the prince or Rajah, who resided at Munnepoora, the capital of Cassy, sited for peace, which was concluded on terms advantageous to the Burmans and as is the custom, a young man and young woman of the kindred of Rajah, were delivered as hostages for the due observances of the compact"¹⁰.

In July 1757 account reached Alungpaya that "Symptoms of disaffection had again been manifested by the Cassayers on the west bank of the Keen-Duen." He was then at Rangoon¹¹. This time he personally undertook the conquest of Manipur and proceeded up the Chindwin river in 1758, with a fleet of boats. The western bank of the river was inhabited by the 'Kathe Shans' tributary to Manipur. The whole tract was laid waste. Afterwards he disembarked and crossing the Ungoching by the Khumbat route marched through Kubo and entered the Manipur valley by the Imole pass at Palel. Bharat

Shah the then king of Manipur tried to resist him without any success. He entered the capital and stayed there for 13 days¹². During that short period "thousands of people were deported for settlement in the Sagaing and Amarapoora districts. Among them were boatmen, silk workers and silversmiths. From this time onwards the astrologers at the Burmese court were Manipuri Brahmins, while Manipuris formed a cavalry in the Burmese army known as Cassy Horse¹³. The news of the revolt of the Peguers made Alanugpaya haste towards Ava. Though the Burmese army withdrew from Manipur proper yet her dependencies on the Burmese side were lost for ever. Kubo valley which was a part of Manipur was also annexed by Burma¹⁴.

Ajit Shah, after his banishment, was residing in Cachar. During two successive invasions in Manipur by the Burmese the weakness of the Government of Manipur became revealed to him and he felt that he had still some chance to recapture the throne. From the communications of Mr. Verelst, it appears that in the course of the year 1762, Ajit Shah represented his case to the British government through the Raja of Tripura and declared that he had been unjustly deposed from the throne and expelled from the country. His reinstatement to the throne of Manipur would be possible only through British help. He was successful in creating a feeling of sympathy for his misfortunes¹⁵.

It has already been mentioned that Jai Singh was the joint ruler of Manipur along with his elder brother Gour Shah from 1756 to 1764. Some misunderstanding between the two brothers might have led to Jai Singh's temporary banishment. British records show that while Ajit Shah was negotiating with the British Government for the restoration of his authority, Jai Singh was at the helm of affairs in Manipur. When he came to know of his uncle's move he deputed his "Vakil Haridas Gossami" with a letter to Mr. Verelst at Chittagong stating, why Ajit Shah had been dethroned. About the truth of this statement the Raja of Tripura appeared perfectly satisfied and the British authorities not only withdrew from any further communication with Ajit Shah but also appeared to support Jai Singh against his machinations and the aggression from Burma¹⁶.

The rapid growth of the Burmese power was viewed with grave concern by the British Government in India. Moreover

during the seven years' war (1756-'63), Anglo-French conflict spread all over the globe. In 1759 Alaungpaya at the instigation of the French destroyed the English settlement in Nagrais, an island at the mouth of Irrawaddy¹⁷. It was at such time Haridas Gossain came from Jai Singh, the ruler of Manipur, to Mr. Verelst, at Chittagong to secure British help for his master to regain the lost territories of Manipur from Burma. He proposed 9 articles as the basis of an alliance to be negotiated between them on behalf of their respective masters. After some discussion the terms of the alliance were finally settled on 14th September 1762 A.D. This is the first formal agreement between the Government of Manipur and the British Government of India. According to the terms of the treaty it was promised to Jai Singh, that a contingent of British troops of the strength of 6 companies of sepoys, would be sent to his aid in his effort to recover those territories wrested from Manipur by Burma. In return, Government of Manipur agreed to grant for ever to the English a rent-free land of 8 thousand cubits, at a suitable place in Manipur for the installation of a factory and a fort and also provide every facility for the promotion of trade with China. The Government of Manipur in its eagerness to get British help not only agreed to pay the expenses of the British troops but also promised fully to compensate the loss suffered by the British at the island of Nagrais. A clause of offensive and defensive alliance was included in the treaty (17A). The terms of the treaty were duly approved of by the Board, of which Mr. Vanisitart, the governor of Bengal was the President¹⁸.

According to the terms of the treaty in January, 1763 a detachment left Chittagong under Mr. Verelst and reached Khaspur the then capital of Kachar near Badarpur in April. But it suffered so much from rain and disease amidst pestilential swamps that its progress to Manipur was arrested. Finding Khaspur unhealthy the contingent fell back on Jainagar on the left bank of the Barak river. "Circumstances of a political nature (war with Mir Kasim) rendering the recall of the force necessary, a letter was despatched to Mr. Verelst, who returned with it to Chittagong"¹⁹.

After the conclusion of the treaty in September, 1762, Haridas Gossain left Chittagong for Manipur to intimate the terms to Jai Singh. Since then till the return of the British troops from

Khaspur to Chittagong, no communication was received from Jai Singh by the British Government. It was at this time Jai Singh was expelled from his position of joint ruler by his elder brother Gour Shah. In the following year (October 1763) three accredited agents of Gour Shah arrived at Chittagong and reconfirmed the terms of the treaty of 1762, on his behalf. They further communicated that the Burmese having destroyed a great part of Manipur it was not possible to meet the expenses incurred by the British Government for the troops, sent up to Khaspur, to be employed at the service of the Manipur Government. As a token of sincerity "500 meklee gold rupees, to be valued at twelve silver rupees each" were offered. It was also assured that the amount already spent on his account and the charges for future military assistance would be duly paid in kind. After this treaty all communications between the British and Manipur appear to have ceased²⁰.

Jai Singh formally ascended the throne in the year 1764 A.D. But he was not destined to rule continuously up to the end of his life. From 1764 to 1793 he lost and regained his power at least three times. At the time of his accession Hsinbyushin (1763-76) was the ruler of Burma. He, in order to reassert the authority of Burma over Manipur, "marched in person against the Manipur cassayers"²¹. When all resistance failed Jai Singh fled to Cachar. His uncle Khelai Nungwa, the Chief of Moirang, played the role of fifth column²². Hsinbyushin stayed in Manipur for nearly a month. Before he returned to Burma he put Wangkheimayum Eringba, a scion of the royal family, in charge of the administration of Manipur²³.

Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh was the ruler of Assam from 1751 A.D. to 1769 A.D. "Tungkhungia Buranji" an original account of the history of Assam, records that Jai Singh, the King of Manipur having been driven out of his country by the Burmese, took shelter in the kingdom of Cachar and asked permission through Kirtichandra Barbarua to meet the Swargadeo. Permission was granted. He reached Rangpur and was introduced to Swargadeo with the recommendation that "The Chief of Manipur has a daughter named Kuranganayani. The Manipuri Raja was descended of old from Babrubahan. He is a kshatriya, and there is no doubt about it. I hope your majesty will marry the princess"²⁴. Swargadeo agreed and the Manipur

Raja's family was brought from Cachar and stationed at Gaurisagar. Marriage was performed with due ceremony. "The princess excavated a tank, and made an establishment at the village Manaimji in the Sarucharai forest, lower down the Dichoi where the Magalus or Manipuris forming part of the marriage settlement were allowed to live"²⁵. Princess Kuranganayani by dint of her merit shortly occupied the position of the chief queen. After the death of Rajeswar Singh, when the Moamaria leader Ragha Moran usurped... the throne from Lakshmi Singh, it was that Manipuri princess who murdered the usurper by a stratagem²⁶. After this marriage Jai Singh requested Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh to help him to secure his throne from the Burmese. In return of his help he promised "If I be placed in my old territory after driving away the Mantarans, I will be a vassal of yours and pay annual tributes"²⁷. Kiti Chandra Barbarua and other members of the court also pleaded for Jai Singh. Rajeswar Singh agreed to help him and an army was sent in 1765 A.D. through the jungles over the Charaideu hills. But it failed to reach Manipur and eventually had to return. This is known in the history of Assam as 'Latakata Ran'²⁸. In the year 1767 A.D. another army was sent along with Jai Singh. It marched through Raha, entered Cachar and encamped at the side of the Merap river. There Jai Singh gathered some followers and entered into Manipur through the hills. The Nagas lent their support to him and as he proceeded, almost all the people of the country welcomed him as their king. The puppet ruler Eringba (Bairang—according to Ahom Buranji) submitted after feeble resistance at Langathen²⁹.

In absence of Jai Singh Manipur was ruled by Eringba, vassal of Burma. Khelai Nungwa, the traitor, occupied an important position. To strengthen his position further, he gave his daughter to the Burmese king. Eringba also to please the Burmese master gave up the sacred thread and the 'mala'. People were not at all pleased with him. To add to their miseries, a terrible flood devastated the valley. Hence when Jai Singh came, they could so easily throw off their allegiance to the puppet ruler. Eringba was however pardoned³⁰.

History of Burma records the next invasion of Manipur by the Burmese forces in 1770 A.D. The Raja was again driven out

and a large number of Manipuris were deported³¹. Fortunately Jai Singh kept up his relation with the king of Assam by making occasional presents³². No sooner had the Burmese withdrawn than he re-entered Manipur with the help of Assam. Under his efficient rule prosperity gradually returned to the country.

But this again lured the Burmese to renew their incursions. The last great Burmese offensive on Manipur was made in 1782. Jai Singh was driven out. They placed one Kelemba of Moirang in his place. But Jai Singh finally succeeded in coming to an understanding with the Burmese ruler Bodawpaya, and was allowed to remain in quiet possession of his devastated country³³. As a result of successive Burmese invasions Manipur became extremely impoverished and depopulated. Francis Hamilton met a priest of Raja Jai Singh at Comilla in 1798. He told him that the Burmese "invaded Manipur about the year 1768, and for eight years remained there, committing every kind of devastation. The country previously had contained a very great number of horses and other cattle, not above one in a hundred of which was left behind. He thinks that the Burmans carried away or destroyed 300,000 persons of different ages and sexes; and indeed it was alleged, when I was at Ava, that 100,000 captives remained near the city"³⁴.

Jai Singh maintained his friendly overtures with Assam even after the death of Rajeswar Singh. He gave a "daughter of the elder brother of Kuranganayani" to Swargadeo Lakshmi Singh³⁵. When the Moamaria rebellion took a formidable turn in Assam in 1786 Swargadeo Gaurinath Singh sent an appeal for help to the kings of the neighbouring states. "Manipur Raja was mindful of the services rendered to him a few years previously by Gaurinath's uncle, Rajeswar and marched with five hundred horses and four thousand foot to Nowgong, where he was met by Gaurinath.

He then proceeded up-country to assist Burha Gohain. When he approached the Moamaria lines, the latter at once gave battle and, after a short engagement, put his troops to flight. Many were killed during the fight and more in the pursuit that followed... He lost no time in hastening back to Manipur. He left a thousand of his men with the Burha Gohain"³⁶. When Major Wood was in Assam in 1794, he saw a contingent of troops

from Manipur come to the assistance of Gaurinath, whom the British forces then restored³⁷.

So far as the records show, the relationship between Assam and Manipur is always found to be very cordial. A coin circulated by Swargadeo Pramatha Singh in 1746 A.D. has been found in Manipur. It indicates commercial relationship existing at that time between the two kingdoms. It may be mentioned that Manipur was invaded by her neighbours in different times but Assam never carried its sword to Manipur. The Swargadeos have had many alliances with the Raja of Manipur and frequent intermarriages with that family. "Since the usurped authority of the Burha Gohain all intercourse with Manipur has been prohibited as its Raja favoured Gaurinath. The roads are now choked, and even commerce has ceased"³⁸.

Once, while in Cachar, Jai Singh made a visit to 'Dacca Dakshin', the ancestral home of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya in Sylhet. There he came in contact with Ramnarayan Shiromani, a descendant of Upendra Misra, grand-father of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Ram Narayan had his education at Nabadwip. He was a great devotee of Lord Chaitanya. Jai Singh was very much impressed by his exposition of the ideal of Sri Chaitanya and persuaded him to go to Manipur. At Manipur Ramnarayan preached the ideal of Gauriya Vaishnavism which gained much popularity among the Manipuris within a short period. When he returned to Sylhet Jai Singh, as a token of his devotion to Lord Gauranga, sent with him a large bell made of brass weighing 5 mds. to be used in the "Sri Mandir" of "Dacca-Dakshin". Unfortunately it was destroyed, after about 90 years when that 'Sri Mandir' accidentally caught fire³⁹. There were other Brahmins and Vaishnava missionaries also who came from Bengal and settled in Manipur at different times during the reign of Jai Singh. Among them mention may be made of Paramananda Thakur, Ganganarayan Chakravarty, Krishnanarayan Chakravarty, Kunjabihari Nidhiram Acharya Thakur, Ram Gopal Bairagi, Adhikari Kamdeb Brajabasi, Krishna Das Thakur and others. It was from that time that Gauriya Vaishnavism came to be recognised as state religion in place of Ramanandi Cult.... Jai Singh built the temple of Govindaji in his palace. Following his example, his minister Ananta Shah built the temple of Vijay Govinda in his house at Mantri Mayum Leikai. Hun-

gaibam Chuda Sarma and the son of Kishori Singh built the temples of Madanmohan and Gopinath respectively. When the construction of the temple of Govindaji was completed Jai Singh assumed the title of "Bhagya Chandra". His daughters would look after the 'pujas of Govindaji'. Among the 'Maharajkumaris' Sijalairoibi through her devotion to Govindaji had high spiritual attainments. Her dance and song reflected her intense devotion. It was 'Lairoibi Sija' the 'Radha of Manipur' who gave concrete shape to an extremely devotional form of dance, conceived by her father Jai Singh. This is the history of the origin of the famous 'Rasa' dance of Manipur. The Princess did not marry. She used to dance before Govindaji playing the part of "Raseswari". She also composed some devotional songs in Bengali to sing for the pleasure of her beloved Lord Govindaji⁴⁰.

Raja Jai Singh spared no pains to bring about spiritual and material regeneration of his country. His activities earned for him that universal esteem which is still cherished by every Manipuri. Along with his innovation in religion and dance mention may be made of the improvement of agriculture effected during his reign by Koirang Khulappa, a certain prince of Rangamati. There were also some changes in dress mainly influenced by the Bengal style⁴¹. Along with Gauriya Vaishnavism, Bengali alphabet and languages also began to gain popularity in Manipur from that time.

In the year 1798 a Brahmin under criminal charge of severe nature was murdered by an official. Jai Singh, the God-fearing ruler, was extremely mortified when he heard of this killing of Brahmin within his domain. In order to absolve himself from the sin, which he believed to have fallen upon him, Jai Singh decided to go to Nabadwip and spend the remaining years of his life entirely in religious pursuits. Accordingly he abdicated the throne in favour of his son Labanya Chandra alias Rabino Chandra and proceeded towards Nabadwip. In the way he built a temple at Bishnupur⁴². Francis Hamilton heard at Comilla from the priest of Jai Singh, who accompanied him, that the Raja due to some ill-feeling prevailing at that time, between the Rajas of Manipur and Cachar, instead of going by the direct route through Kashpur, cut a new road through the forest to the south and made his way to Sylhet with 700 men. "The Chief travelled on horse back.... He was very

poor, and his train was supported at the expense of Tripura Raja". From Sylhet he went to Agartala on a visit to the Raja of Tripura. "The Chief of Manipur was then an old man and had with him three sons and an equal number of daughters, one of whom had married Radan Manik⁴³, Raja of Tripura". From Agartala he went to Nabadwip. But there was at that time no permanent residence for the rulers of Manipur at Nabadwip. Accordingly, he sent his vakil Rashbehari Das with a letter to Lord Mornington, the then Governor-General of India, expressing his "desire for a piece of land on the river for building a house which may serve him as a bathing resort"⁴⁴. After staying for some time at Nabadwip he proceeded by boat to visit Brindaban, but on the way he met death in 1799 at Bhagabangola in the district of Murshidabad⁴⁵. Sija Lairoibi accompanied her father up to Nabadwip where she spent her days singing and meditating on Lord Krishna⁴⁶.

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CHAPTER VI

SONS OF JAI SINGH AND THE CONQUEST OF CACHAR

RABINCHANDRA

JAI SINGH had eight sons, Sanahal, Labanya Chandra alias Rabinchandra, Madhuchandra, Tulsijit, Chaurajit, Marjit, Daoji alias Khongjai Ngamba and Gambhir Singh. Sanahal pre-deceased his father. Jai Singh had placed Rabinchandra on the throne in 1798, before he left for Nabadwip. From this time up to first Anglo-Burmese war, the history of Manipur is stained with fratricidal war. The princes fell out among themselves to secure the throne. Daoji and Gambhir Singh with the help of their relatives hatched a conspiracy. After a period of three years Rabinchandra's reign was one day cut short by the assassin's sword in 1801, while he was returning to the palace after playing polo¹.

MADHUCHANDRA

Madhuchandra, the third son of Jai Singh, foiling the purpose of the conspirators captured power immediately after the murder of Rabinchandra. Gambhir Singh and his party, baffled in their first attempt were lying in wait for a fresh opportunity. Madhuchandra, to strengthen his position, appointed Chaurajit and Marjit to the posts of "Jubraj" (heir apparent) and Senapati (Chief of the army) respectively. But this also failed to maintain the cohesion. Jubraj Chaurajit threw off his allegiance to Madhuchandra but failing to capture power he left Manipur for Nabadwip. After a short period he again decided to re-enter Manipur. At Cachar he managed to rally some hundred followers and with them he made his venture. Senapati Marjit at such hour joined with Chaurajit. Madhuchandra was defeated at the battle of Sangaithen and fled to Cachar in 1806².

CHAURAJIT

Chaurajit after occupying the throne appointed Marjit as his 'Jubaraj' and Senapati. In the meantime Madhuchandra entered into an alliance with Krishna Chandra, the ruler of Cachar, by giving his daughter Induprabha to him³. With his help he made his last attempt to regain power, but was defeated and killed by Chaurajit at Bishnupur⁴.

But the position of Chaurajit was also not very secure. Within a short period Marjit made an unsuccessful attempt to capture power and fled to Tummo. There he sought the intervention of Bodawpaya (1779-1819), king of Ava, who brought about a reconciliation between the two brothers. But it did not last long. He again made two successive attempts on the capital but failing to capture it, he escaped to Cachar⁵. Marjit had some horses with him including "a hockey pony of quite exceptional excellence". He presented the ruler of Cachar, Krishna Chandra and his brother Govinda Chandra four horses. Govinda Chandra asked for the best one, when it was refused, he snatched from him seven more horses⁶. Marjit felt much offended and with a few followers went to Ava hoping to get help from that side. He agreed to renounce the claim of Manipur over Kubo-Valley and even to acknowledge the overlordship of Burma if he could be placed on the throne of Manipur. After about 7 years, he succeeded in inducing the ruler of Burma to espouse his cause.

During the winter of 1812 one division of the Burmese army accompanied by Marjit reached Kakching Khulel in Manipur through the Imole Pass. Another division led by the Sumjok Raja entered into Manipur by the Muchee route and encamped near Hueerok. This division was totally defeated and its leader killed by Pitambar Singh, a nephew of Raja Chaurajit. Pitambar then advanced to Kakching but was miserably defeated. Now it was the turn for Chaurajit to flee to Cachar. Gambhir Singh also followed him. Marjit became the ruler of Manipur⁷.

At Cachar Chaurajit was not sitting idle. He had already learnt from Krishna Chandra that the British Government was making preparation to declare war against Burma. He thought that as he was driven out by the Burmese forces, the British might help him to secure his throne⁸. Accordingly in the year 1813,

he sent his uncle, Bhadra Singh, with a letter to the Governor-General with a view to making an alliance with him. He promised that if the Governor-General agreed to help to restore his authority, his Naga and Kuki forces would be at the disposal of the British Government in their operation against Burma⁹.

Soon after the despatch of this letter Chaurajit due to some misunderstanding with the new ruler of Cachar (1813), Govinda Chandra, left Cachar for Jaintia and began to raid Cachar. Govinda Chandra also heard that Ram Singh, the Chief of Jaintia, was making preparations to invade Cachar. He was not at all sure of his strength and feeling helpless in the face of imminent attack, applied for help to the Governor-General of India¹⁰. But no help came from the British Government. In the mean time Gambhir Singh, brother of Chaurajit who was appointed Senapati of Cachar forces joined in a conspiracy against Govinda Chandra along with other important officers like Tularam and Sanandaram. Govinda Chandra again applied to the Governor-General of India in 1823 to allow him to get the service of one Englishman and 25 Hindusthani sepoys¹¹.

INVASION OF CACHAR BY MARJIT

It has been already said that towards the close of 1812 Marjit occupied the throne of Manipur as a vassal of Burma. He never forgot the insult he had received from Govinda Chandra. He decided to take his revenge by attacking Cachar after consolidating his authority in Manipur. But before doing so, he in a letter to the Magistrate of Sylhet explained his intention as well as the reason for invading Cachar, so that the British Government might not come to the aid of Govinda Chandra due to any misunderstanding¹². In reply to that letter the Magistrate informed him that he had received no orders from the Governor-General to help the Raja of Cachar. Only Capt. Davidson had been sent to Badarpur with troops to guard the frontier of the company's territory¹³. In 1818 Chaurajit feeling confident of his position in Manipur marched against Cachar with a large force. It was quite impossible on the part of Govinda Chandra to resist him. Chaurajit at the request of Govinda Chandra came from Jaintia to help him. Gambhir

Singh also stood by his side. Such unexpected alliance among them compelled Marjit to retire. But Chaurajit at the end of this trouble remained in possession of a large part of Cachar kingdom¹⁴.

MANIPUR UNDER MARJIT

In 1812 Marjit securing the throne of Manipur sent the Burmese forces back to their country and remained in undisputed possession of the country for about six years¹⁵. These years passed in peace and he found time to undertake some development works. He made some additions and alterations in the palace and further beautified it. A road from the palace up to Sangaithen was constructed in his time¹⁶. Some Burmese fashions including the dragon as the state emblem were introduced. This was due to his long association with the Burmese. Friendly relation with Burma facilitated foreign trade. Grazing grounds again became crowded with cattle. In view of the return of prosperity in Manipur many of those who left the country along with Chaurajit came back¹⁷. But in spite of it Marjit for his dependence on Burma and leanings towards Burmese fashions failed to earn much regard from his people. That became apparent at the time of his invasion of Cachar in 1818. The numerical strength of his forces was so much superior to the combined army of Govinda Chandra, Chaurajit and Gambhir Singh that he could have easily occupied Cachar. But when it became known to his forces that they would have to fight against Chaurajit and Gambhir Singh, no allurement could stir up any enthusiasm in them to fight. Marjit was quick to realise the workings of their mind and to prevent further calamities, he hurried back to Manipur¹⁸.

Though Marjit ascended the throne of Manipur formally acknowledging the suzerainty of the ruler of Burma yet within a few years he realised that he could rule his country practically as an independent king. He reduced his subjection to a mere agreement paper. Yet nothing untoward happened between the two countries. His soaring ambition sneaked in Kubo Valley also. Without receiving any authority from Burma, he allowed people to cut down trees in that valley.

Old Bodawpaya, the ruler of Burma, was naturally offended

but he had then no time to take steps. After his death in 1819, Bagyidaw succeeded him. It was at his request that the late ruler of Burma had agreed to help Marjit to secure the throne of Manipur. Bagyidaw after ascending the throne summoned Marjit to the Burmese capital to pay homage. Marjit apprehended that he would be put to trouble if he attended the installation of the new king. He pleaded his inability to attend the ceremony due to the hostile intentions of his brothers—Chaurajit and Gambhir Singh. A Burmese army was immediately despatched to seize him. After an unsuccessful encounter Marjit, with his army, fled to Cachar¹⁹.

OCCUPATION OF CACHAR BY THE REFUGEE KINGS OF MANIPUR

Having been driven out of Manipur, Marjit came to Cachar and surrendered himself to Chaurajit. He also handed over to him the charge of the sacred image of Govindaji. Chaurajit pardoned him and received him with kindness. Then the three brothers Chaurajit, Marjit and Gambhir Singh occupied the whole of Cachar Kingdom. Govinda Chandra fled to Sylhet and applied to the Governor-General to annex Cachar and bring it under the administration of Sylhet District. But the British Government then refused to interfere in the affairs of Cachar²⁰. Letters from Cooch Behar and Assam also tell the same story “The prevailing anarchy and disorder loudly called for British intervention, if not annexation. The nobles of Assam like the Raja of Cachar, implored the Governor-General again and again to save their unhappy land from desolation and ruin but the East India Company’s government refused to interfere until Burmese aggression forced their hands and rendered a radical revision of their North Eastern Frontier policy an imperative necessity”²¹.

The Kingdom of Cachar was already divided into two parts between Govinda Chandra and Chaurajit. The three Manipuri brothers after driving away Govinda Chandra repartitioned it among themselves. Chaurajit ruled the tract east of the Tilai hill from Sonaimukh. Gambhir Singh got the land west of Tilain hill, which he ruled from Gumrah and Marjit ruled Hailakandi from Jhapirband²².

ATTEMPTS TO RESTORE MANIPUR TILL 1823

The Burmese forces after occupying Manipur in 1819 placed one Jadu Singh, son-in-law of Gharib Niwaz, on the throne of Manipur. But shortly he was replaced by Shoobal Singh, brother of Nara Singh²³. But none of them ever enjoyed the confidence of the Manipuris. Heera Chandra, son of a former ruler Rabino Chandra, remained in Manipur and supported by his countrymen continued to annoy the Burmese garrison. In 1822 Pitambar Singh, a nephew of Marjit, went from Cachar to help Heera Chandra. They succeeded in defeating a large Burmese detachment. The country had been so much devastated, that the leaders of these parties found themselves unable to get provisions for their men and they withdrew into Cachar. Next year Pitambar was again sent to oust Shoobal, the puppet ruler. He became successful in his mission, but refused to hand over the country to Chaurajit. At this, Gambhir Singh went to Manipur with a small force and defeated Pitambar near Jaynagar. Pitambar fled to Ava for good. Gambhir Singh from the extreme difficulty of obtaining supplies was compelled to return to Cachar almost immediately²⁴.

The Princes of Manipur, even when banished from their country, failed to pull on well with each other. After returning from his raid in Manipur in 1823, Gambhir Singh soon quarrelled with Chaurajit and occupied the whole of Cachar. Marjit was allowed to enjoy his share under him but Chaurajit took shelter in Sylhet and remained there till the outbreak of the first Anglo-Burmese War²⁵.

In the mean time Govinda Chandra, the deposed ruler of Cachar, finding no hope of getting any help from the British Government, entered into negotiations with the Burmese Government. In the year 1823, Burmese army invaded Cachar through Manipur but they were repelled by Gambhir Singh. When the Anglo-Burmese War was formally declared in 1824, Marjit, feeling insecure at Cachar, fled to Sylhet²⁶. From 1823 to 1824 Gambhir Singh made repeated requests to the British authorities for help against the Burmese incursions. But they preferred not to make any commitment in this affair until the outbreak of the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824²⁷.

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CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST ANGLO-BURMESE WAR (1824-26) AND GAMBHIR SINGH

THOUGH the English had commercial intercourse with Burma since the 17th century, their political relationship with that country began to grow a century later. By the middle of the 18th century when the paramount power of India fell into their hands and their empire extended in the eastern side up to the farthest limits of Chittagong, Sylhet and Goalpara districts, the Empire of Alaungpaya gradually bringing Pegu, Tenasserim and Arakan within its fold touched the border of the British frontier district of Chittagong. Conflict is inevitable when the two rising imperialist powers meet at a common frontier¹. After the conquest of Arakan by Burma, large number of Arakanese for fear of oppression crossed the border and took asylum in Chittagong. The Government of Burma demanded total expulsion of all these Arakanese, and threatened war, if the demand was not met. Lord Wellesley, however, refused on 'grounds of humanity' to consider expulsion. The imminent outbreak of hostilities was prevented by the mission of Symes². In the meantime fresh refugees from Arakan entered Chittagong and began to make inroads into Burmese territories from their new base. This rendered the Anglo-Burmese relation more strained. In 1718 when the English were engaged in suppressing the Pindaris, Bodawpaya, the Emperor of Burma, sent a letter to Lord Hastings "demanding the surrender of Chittagong, Dacca and Kassimbazar which in medieval times paid tribute to the ruler of Arakan." When Hastings received this letter the Pindari menace was over. "The Governor-General returned it to the Burmese King with the comment that it was perhaps a forgery"³. On receipt of such a reply, Burma would have immediately declared war. But the death of Bodawpaya at that moment, defeat of the Burmese forces at Siam, and on the other hand, the success of their

opponents against the Marathas (1817-18) and the Pindaris made the Government of Burma pause.

In 1817 the Burmese army taking advantage of the internal dissensions in Assam entered that country and placed their nominee Chandra Kanta Singh on the throne. But shortly after the Burmese army had withdrawn the party opposed to Chandra Kanta went on intriguing against him and finally dislodged him. The Burmese were informed of the turn of the events and they at once despatched a strong contingent under the command of Ala mingyi. Chandra Kanta joined with him and was raised to the throne under Burmese suzerainty. But he was not long to enjoy the friendship and protection of the Burmese. He scented danger and fled to Gauhati. Chandra Kanta then became determined to oust the Burmese from Assam. The Burmese forces again poured into Assam in 1821 under Mingimaha Bandula who defeated and drove out Chandra Kanta⁴.

The occupation of Manipur by Burma in 1818 has already been narrated in the previous chapter. Govinda Chandra, the Raja of Cachar deposed by the princes of Manipur might have been negotiating with the Burmese authorities at that time. The British district Goalpara became the victim of Burmese raids. Lord Amherst wrote, "There is nothing now to prevent them from sacking Dacca and plundering all the adjoining districts". In 1823 the Burmese occupied the island of Shahpuri near Chittagong from the British. Next year Ram Singha II, the Raja of Jaintia, was called upon to pay his homage to the Emperor of Burma being also the sovereign of Assam. The British asked the Burmese not to enter into Jaintia. The Burmese paid no heed to it and soon marched into Cachar and Jaintia. No territory was then left outside the eastern frontier of British India, to be conquered by Burama⁵.

Bodawpaya died in 1819, and he was succeeded by his grandson Bagyidaw. The new monarch living in the midst of sycophants failed at times to measure accurately his own strength or that of his adversaries. "With absolute ignorance of international affairs King Bagyidaw attributed to himself omnipotence of invincibility; in his opinion which was confirmed by Mingimaha Bandula, the English were mere traders and they could be easily subdued by his Assamese levies, and his redoubtable Burman Commanders might rest in peace behind the shadow of the golden throne."

The British success in India was attributed to the incompetence of the Hindus; the British army would experience different results when they would have to deal with the Burmans who were not Hindus. The impoverished coffers caused by a futile war with the British was proposed to be replenished by the plunder of Calcutta. "The Burmans had conquered the Chins, the Singphos, the Manipuris and the Assamese; and after such a series of triumphs their victory over the British was a foregone conclusion. After the conquest of Calcutta, King Bagyidaw proposed to march to England, the occupation of which would be signalled by the installation of his son as viceroy of all the British dominions." Success of the Burmese in Assam further strengthened his beliefs⁶.

However provoking might be the activities of the Burmans, the British tried up to the last moment to avoid war. Neither the condition in India nor the attitude of the British Parliament was in favour of their entering into a large-scale warfare. But when the Burmese became so much determined to invade the British territories and drag them to war, Lord Amherst, the then Governor-General of India, finally on the 24th February, 1824, declared formal war against Burma.

The princes of Manipur were eagerly waiting for this moment. When the war actually broke out the British Government realised the importance of Cachar and Manipur. Moreover, the co-operation of the local people was necessary to conduct any operation in that direction. It was under these circumstances that the British Government had to change its indifferent attitude towards those deposed rulers of Cachar and Manipur and open talks for alliance. A treaty of subordinate alliance was concluded with Gobinda Chandra, by which the British Government agreed to accept him as the ruler of Cachar. Simultaneously, the British accepted the responsibility of protecting Jaintia⁷. In the meantime the British forces began their operations and by October 1824, they became successful in driving away the Burmese from Jaintia and Cachar. But Manipur and the Brahmaputra Valley remained still under Burmese occupation⁸.

After the expulsion of the Burmese from Cachar, the British officers called together the three brothers, Chaurajit, Marjit, and Gambhir Singh and proposed the following arrangements: "Chau-

rajit to be Rajah, with Marjit Jubarajah and successor and Gambhir Singh Senapati or General-in-Chief." It is said that Chaurajit and Marjit on account of age refused to accept this arrangement. Accordingly Gambhir Singh was made Raja and Nar Singh, a great-grandson of Gharib Niwaz was made Senapati. Chaurajit receiving a monthly pension of Rs. 100/- from the British government went to Nabadwip. Similarly, Marjit also got a pension of Rs. 100/- per month and settled in Sylhet. He died at Balughat, a place in the southern part of Sylhet⁹.

When the Burmese army retreated from Cachar but were still in occupation of Manipur, a large British army of 6,000 strong under Brig. General Suldham came to Cachar from Dacca to enter into Manipur and invade Burma. But through the jungles and swamps they could not advance further than the Jiri river. Camels brought for carrying baggages were found to be useless in that area. Losses due to diseases were so heavy that the army had finally to be withdrawn from that area.

David Scott was already carrying on negotiations with Gambhir Singh to have effective co-operation from him. Gambhir Singh expressed his willingness to advance into Manipur with 500 men who later on constituted the Manipur Levy. After the agreement with the British regarding the future political set-up of Manipur, Gambhir Singh and Nar Singh with their men went to Badarpur camp to receive military training. Expenses of training and equipments of this Manipur Levy were entirely borne by the British Government¹⁰.

Before October 1824 the Burmese had a force of ten thousand strong at Dudpatli near Silchar. Their sudden disappearance from that stronghold apparently seems to be very strange, specially when the roads were still muddy and swamps not dried up offering an extremely difficult field for the British forces to advance.

But a look into the general plan of the British operation will help to understand the mystery. The British forces simultaneously began their operations by land in the (i) Assam and (ii) Arakan fronts and through the sea in the (iii) Rangoon front. The object in the Rangoon front was to keep a large Burmese force engaged. At the beginning of the war in the Assam and Arakan front, the British forces were successful in keeping their enemy at bay, but they failed to make much headway due to lack

of supplies and geographical barriers. In the Rangoon front also the achievements were negligible. On the other hand, the hill tribes of Assam oppressed by the Burmese began to rise against them. At this time Chandra Kanta, the deposed ruler of Assam, again laid his feet in the Burmese trap and was imprisoned at Jorhat. Still the conditions for the Burmese did not improve. Discontents and risings always haunted them. The Burmese general Mingimaha Bandula was faced with a grave situation due to shortage of supplies. He handed over the charge of Assam to a governor and himself went back to Burma withdrawing major portion of his forces. It was probably for this reason the Burmese forces were found to disappear overnight from Cachar in 1824¹¹.

Mingimaha Bandula after returning from Burma proceeded to attack Bengal through Arakan. A British force was defeated by him at a place called Ramu. But almost at the same time he was called upon to resist the advance of Archibald Campbell in the Rangoon front. At this stage the aggressive policy of Burma came to an end. After that, all battles fought by Burma were purely defensive. In December 1824, Mingimaha Bandula appeared with his forces before Rangoon but was driven 40 miles north to Donabew. In April 1825 he was finally defeated and killed by Campbell. Prome, the capital of Southern Burma, fell to the British. Thereupon the war entered in its last phase. The Emperor of Burma came down from his dreamland to negotiate peace with the British¹².

The liberation of Manipur from the Burmese occupation is intimately connected with the 1st Anglo-Burmese War. The brief summary of that war in different fronts given above will help the reader to understand the circumstances which favoured Gambhir Singh to achieve his object. When Suldham's forces to enter Manipur withdrew from that area leaving two small contingents at Sylhet, Gambhir Singh sought permission to enter into Manipur with his men. In the meantime the major portion of the Burmese forces having been withdrawn from the Assam front, the chances of severe resistance from the Burmese side became few. Hence the permission sought by Gambhir Singh to move was easily obtained¹³.

On the 17th May, 1825, Gambhir Singh with 500 Manipuri soldiers marched for Manipur from Sylhet and reached Bans-

kandi within 7 days. Lieutenant Pemberton, a British Officer, also accompanied him. From Banskandi they marched along the muddy road for 30 miles. Beyond that there stood in front of them steep ranges stretching from north to south. Gambhir Singh with his men after crossing innumerable hurdles reached the western border of the Manipur valley on the 10th June, 1825. On his arrival the Burmese forces fell back at Undra, 10 miles away from Imphal. After occupying Imphal. Gambhir Singh marched to Undra and found that the Burmese had already left. By the end of June, he returned to Sylhet leaving behind only 300 soldiers to defend Manipur¹⁴.

On December 18, 1825, Gambhir Singh, having obtained some reinforcements (1,500 muskets and requisite number of men)¹⁵ returned to Manipur. He was accompanied by Captain Grant. At that time, there were still 300 or 400 Burmese soldiers in the Kubo valley. But shortly they left that place leaving the valley solely under the protection of 500 local people. Gambhir Singh sent his troops there early in January, 1826. The Raja of Sumjok collected about 700 men in the Tammu stockade to resist the advance of Gambhir Singh's troops. Thereupon Gambhir Singh and Captain Grant arrived at the scene and put them to flight. The sudden disappearance of the Raja of Sumjok was partly due to the impression that a British battalion had entered Manipur. Captain Grant expected that such an impression would cause some alarm at the Burmese Capital and create a diversion in favour of the British army operating in the Delta. Another stockade on the right bank of the Ningthi river also fell into their hands. Captain Grant reported: "The activity, judgement and skill, he (*i.e.*, Gambhir Singh) has displayed on this occasion, has proved the justice of the opinion previously entertained of his merits. The steady gallantry which, without the usual aid of canon could force a brave enemy to evacuate a strongly fortified position, is a very satisfactory illustration of the character of his followers"¹⁶.

On February 1, 1826, Gambhir Singh arrived on the western bank of the Ningthi and found the entire area deserted. The inhabitants had made a hurried retreat leaving their cattle behind and allowing the Manipuri prisoners to escape. Even the bank on the opposite side of the river was deserted¹⁷. It was then the last stage of the war.

After the defeat and death of Mingimaha Bandula at Donabew in April, 1825, the prospect of the war became clear to the Emperor Bagyidaw. Yet in order to have a better bargain he was advised by his ministers to continue the war during the rainy season. Campbell spent the rainy season at Prome. The Burmese forces failing to make any profit out of the season only whiled away their time. In the month of August when the sky again became clear Bagyidaw at last showed his eagerness for peace. But the severe terms offered by the British were not acceptable to him. His forces were still roving in Assam, Manipur and North Burma. He was not ready to be cowed so easily. Fighting recommenced. For the last time the Burmese guns thundered for a while and were finally silenced. In the meantime Gambhir Singh occupied Manipur and his forces proceeded to Ava, the western bank of the Ningthi river on the 1st February, 1826. Ava was not far off. Campbell also advancing northward occupied Yandaboo, a town within 45 miles from Ava. All chances of defence through resistance vanished in the air. The war came to a close by the Treaty of Yandaboo signed on the 24th February, 1826¹⁸.

Gambhir Singh's title to the throne of Manipur was recognised by the treaty. But there was still some confusion about the nature of his authority. It was stated in the Article (II), "His majesty the King of Ava renounced all claims upon and will abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntee. With regard to Munnipore, it is stipulated, that should Gambhir Singh desire to return to that country, he shall be recognised by the King of Ava as Raja thereof." It was not clarified whether Gambhir Singh should be treated as the sovereign ruler of Manipur or a vassal king under Burma. From the British standpoint it was not safe to allow Manipur to remain a dependency of Burma because the existence of Burmese hold on Manipur would expose the Sylhet frontier to the danger which had precipitated the war in 1824. The question was discussed by the company's government in Calcutta and even referred to the Court of Directors. "Major Burney, Resident at Ava, was directed to report to Calcutta the sentiments of the Burmese Ministers on this delicate subject. But fortunately they did not demand suzerainty over Manipur. On one point however

they persistently refused to make any concession. During the military operations Gambhir Singh had succeeded in occupying not only Manipur but also the Kubo valley inhabited by the Shans. The Burmese Government refused to agree to the inclusion of the Kubo valley in Gambhir Singh's dominions, claiming that it was an integral part of the Burmese Empire. Within a few weeks of the conclusion of the treaty of Yandaboo some Burmese troops crossed the river Ningthi and entered the disputed valley, but they soon retired into the Burmese territory of their own accord. Instead of renewing hostilities Gambhir Singh submitted the matter to the decision of the British Government. The authorities in Calcutta supported the claim of Gambhir Singh until, in 1832, Major Burney submitted a confidential report in favour of the Burmese claim. In his letter dated July 5, 1832, he pointed out that the disputed valley had been in possession of the Burmese Kings since 1370 A.D. and that for 12 years prior to the outbreak of the late war the Burmese had enjoyed uninterrupted possession." Accordingly Lord William Bentinck decided to return the valley to Buima¹⁹. The Government of India wrote to its Resident at Ava on March 16, 1833, "... the supreme government still adheres to the opinion that the Ningthee formed the proper boundary between Ava and Manipur; but that in consideration for his Majesty's (i.e. Burmese King) feelings and wishes and in the spirit of amity and good will subsisting between the two countries, the supreme government consents to the restoration of the Kubo valley to Ava, and to the establishment of the boundary line at the foot of the Yoomadoung hills". The transfer of the valley took place on January 9, 1834. Gambhir Singh accepted the decision with reluctance. In order to compensate Manipur for this loss the Government of India agreed to give the Raja a stipend of Rs. 500/- per month. which continued till the integration of the state with the Indian Union.

There are reasons to doubt the authenticity of Major Burney's report. It is found in the history of Assam written by Gait that in 1475 the King of Manipur along with the King of Pong invaded Khumbat and established his authority over the Kubo valley. According to Major-General Sir James Johnstone (who was a political agent in Manipur for a long time), sometimes the rulers of Manipur "held a considerable territory east of the Chindwin river in subjection, at other times only the Kubo

valley, a strip of territory, inhabited not by Burmese, but by Shans and lying between Manipur proper and Chindwin. Again they were driven back into Manipur proper. For the greater part of the century (18th century) the Kubo valley unquestionably belonged to Manipur and it was never in any sense a Burmese province, being, when not under Manipur, a feudatory of the great Shan Kingdom of Pong²⁰. In view of the chequered history of Burma it is difficult to believe that "the valley had been in possession of the Burmese Kings since 1370 A. D." as stated by Major Burney. The Puranas of Manipur also refer to the valley as a part of the Kingdom of Manipur. In fact, the river Ningthi forms the geographical boundary of Manipur in the eastern side and the political boundary also should have coincided with that. The report of Major Burney regarding the Kubo valley was probably influenced by his desire to gain popularity at the Burmese court. William Bentinck also, it seems, preferred to please the powerful Burmese ally by conceding to their demand at the cost of Manipur. But neither Gambhir Singh nor his descendants willingly acquiesced in the cession of what they considered to be their ancestral territory. It is heard that when the decision of the Government of India was communicated to ailing Gambhir Singh at his palace, he became extremely mortified and on that very day breathed his last.

By a treaty executed at Badarpur on March 6, 1824 Govinda Chandra had been recognised as the protected ruler of Cacha²¹. Gambhir Singh who ruled over Manipur for some time nourished the desire of annexing that kingdom to Manipur. Moreover his relationship with Govinda Chandra was far from cordial. It is said that he was once insulted by Govinda Chandra in a meeting for not paying due regard to him.

It may be recalled here that Gambhir Singh after coming from Manipur to Cachar served in the army of Govinda Chandra for some time on a monthly salary of Rs. 50²². At the end of the Anglo-Burmese War, Gambhir Singh, having been placed on the throne of Manipur, decided to take his revenge. One day in April, 1880 Govinda Chandra was assassinated at his secret instigation²³. Several claimants at once put forward their claim over Cachar. But the most serious claim was that of Gambhir Singh, who applied for a lease of Cachar for 20 years on an annual

tribute of Rs. 15,000. His claim was supported by Captain Grant, Commissioner of Manipur, but seriously opposed by Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton, who pointed out that it would be dangerous to entrust the defence of Cachar to the weak ruler of Manipur. Lord William Bentinck decided in favour of annexation. A hilly tract in the eastern part of Cachar was given to Gambhir Singh, the plains were annexed on August 14, 1832 and formed a district²⁴.

Successive Burmese invasions on Manipur for the last 60 years came to a close with the termination of the First Anglo-Burmese War. Burma at last had to renounce her claim over Manipur. But finally when they left the country, the number of the adult male population in the valley did not exceed 3000²⁵. A large number of people had been killed in action or carried into captivity or had fled for safety to the Suima Valley²⁶. Colonies of Manipuri refugees grew up in different parts of Cachar, Sylhet and Tripura. Many went as far as Dacca for safety. Agriculture and cottage industries of Manipur were completely ruined. Fields were covered with jungles. The valley presented a very desolate and gloomy appearance. Gambhir Singh and Nar Singh had to initiate everything newly. The image of Govindaji was brought back from Sylhet and reinstalled in the palace-temple. The hill tribes who became independent during the war were again brought under the rule of the Manipur Government. Normal life within the state was gradually restored. Agriculture and industry were revived. Gambhir Singh built a new palace on a hill top at Langthabal three miles and a half south of the old palace. A long canal also was excavated for boat-race in front of the new palace. The rulers of Manipur used it for their residence till 1844. But later on it was badly damaged by two successive earthquakes of 1869 and 1880. The ruins of that palace may still be seen in that area.

Formerly the Kings of Manipur had their sway extended even over the interior of Naga hills. This is evident from the Manipuri names of many Naga villages in that region. But during the period of the decadence, just before and during the Burmese war of 1819-25, whatever influence Manipur had was gone. In 1832, Captains Jenkins and Pemberton escorted by Gambhir Singh and his troops forced a passage through the hills with a

view to finding out a practicable route up to Assam. They went via Paptongmei and Samagudting, to Mohong and Deljood. At that time Gambhir Singh re-asserted the authority of Manipur over that area and reduced to submission several villages including Kohima, the largest of them. At Kohima he stood upon a stone and had his footprints set up in a prominent position, together with an upright stone having carved figures (dragon insignia) and an inscription. The Nagas greatly respected this stone and cleaned it from time to time. They opened large trade with Manipur and whenever a Manipuri visited a Naga village he was treated as an honoured guest, at a time when a British subject could not venture into the interior without risk of being murdered.

Even till the Naga Hill campaign of 1879-80 the Nagas regarded Manipur as the stronger power of the two (Manipur and British)²⁷. In 1833 when the Angamis started giving troubles to the British, Gambhir Singh with his forces accompanied by Lt. Gordon, Adjutant of the Manipur Levy, again subdued Kohima and other Angami villages and exacted tributes²⁸. As a result of the repeated expeditions many Nagas began to learn Manipuri. Had there been no British administration and European missionary activities, the people of these areas might have gradually accepted the Manipuri culture.

Gambhir Singh had no children for a long time. After his death the succession of Nar Singh was almost a certainty. But a few years before his death in 1831 prince Chandrakirti was born. Nar Singh did not at all feel disappointed. He had no hankering for the throne. In the year 1839 on the 9th January Gambhir Singh died in his langthabal palace²⁹.

Gambhir Singh restored Manipur from the Burmese with British help. For that he was always grateful to the British and helped them according to his capacity, to tide over any difficulty in this frontier. But in view of this it must not be construed that he accepted the throne of Manipur as a vassal of the British. In his treaty with the British Government in 1833 (which will be discussed in the next chapter) there is no clause showing his sovereignty was in any way curtailed. It is found in the *Statistical Account of Manipur* written by Mr. Brown in 1873 that "on the conclusion of the Burmese war by the treaty of the Yendabo in 1826, Manipur was declared independent." Hence Manipur

during the time of Gambhir Singh should not be ranked with other native states of India. There were reasons for the British also to remain grateful to Gambhir Singh. Had they not received the timely help from this brave son of Manipur it would have been impossible for them to launch an attack on Ava through Manipur and bring the war to conclusion so early in 1826³⁰.

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- ⁴ R. M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, pp. 10-11
- ⁵ Banerjee, *Eastern Frontier of British India*
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- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 293
- ⁹ Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*
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- ¹⁸ a. Major Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*
b. Hall, *Burma*, p. 105
- ¹⁹ A. C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 491-92
- ²⁰ Johnstone, *My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills*, p. 81
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- ²⁴ B. P. Chakravarti, *Annexation of Cachar*
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- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34
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CHAPTER VIII

NAR SINGH (1834-59)

AT the time of Gambhir Singh's death in 1834, prince Chandra Kirti was only two years old. Accordingly Nar Singh became the regent and took over the administration of the country. He gave ample proof of his leadership and heroism during the last war. But the successive attempts of different aspirants on the throne did not allow him to rule peacefully. The first occurred in 1838. In that year Taring Komba, the eldest son of Rabino Chandra, made a raid with three hundred followers from Cachar. They were defeated and dispersed by Nar Singh's forces. Tarring Komba was killed within a short period. Jogindro Singh, the eldest son of Marjit, tried to invade the country. But both he and his brother were killed in the hills on their way to the valley. Tribhuban jit and Ram Singh, two sons of Chaurajit, also made vain attempt to capture the throne and were killed. In 1844 after an unsuccessful attempt when Maharani Kumudini Devi, the mother of Chandra Kirti, left with her son for Cachar, Nar Singh formally ascended the throne. The last attempt to dislodge him was made by Melai Romba and his brother, descendants of Raja Charairongba. They invaded the valley from Cachar. Nar Singh's forces defeated them. Melai Romba's brother was killed, and he himself was taken prisoner. "He was executed by being put into a basket and flung into the river. This was the last political execution up to 1873¹.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MANIPUR AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

After the death of Govinda Chandia, the ruler of Cachar, Gambhir Singh made an appeal to the British government to give him that territory on lease. But why it was not given to him has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The boundary between Manipur State and the newly formed Cachar district

still remained undefined. This and other petty incidents created misunderstanding between Manipur and British India. Finally the Governor-General and Council communicated the following resolution to Gambhir Singh in 1833.

1st—The Raja will, agreeably to instructions received, without delay, remove his thana from Chandrapur, and establish it on the eastern bank of the Jiri.

2nd—The Raja will, in no way obstruct the trade carried on between the two countries by Bengalee and Manipuri merchants. He will not exact heavy duties, and he will make a monopoly of no articles of merchandise whatsoever.

3rd—The Raja will in no way prevent the Nagas inhabiting the Kala Naga and Naonjai ranges of hills from selling or bartering ginger, cotton, pepper, and every other article, the produce of their country, in the Plains of Cachar, at the Banskandi and Oodherban bazars as has been their custom.

4th—With regard to the road commencing from the eastern bank of the Jiri, and continuing via Kala Naga and Kowpum as far as the valley of Manipur, after this road has been finished, the Raja will keep it in repairs, so as to enable laden bullocks to pass during the cold and dry seasons. Further, at the making of the road, if British officers be sent to examine or superintend the same, the Raja will agree to everything these officers may suggest.

5th—With reference to the intercourse already existing between the territories of the British Govt., and those of the Raja, if the intercourse be further extended, it will be well in every respect, and it will be highly advantageous to both the Raja and his country. In order, therefore, that this may speedily take place, the Raja at the requisition of the British Govt. will furnish a quota of Nagas to assist in the construction of the road.

6th—In the event of the war with the Burmese, if the troops be sent to Manipur either to protect the country or to advance to Ningthi, the Raja, at the requisition of the British Govt. will provide hill porters to assist in transporting ammunitions and baggage of such troops.

7th—In the event of anything happening on the eastern frontier of the British territories the Raja will, when required, assist the British Govt. with a portion of his troops.

8th—The Raja will be answerable for all the ammunition he

receives from the British Govt. and will, for the information of the British Govt. give in every month a statement of expenditure to the British officer attached to the levy”.

To those clauses it was added that “the two ranges of hills Kala Naga ... and Noonjai, which are situated between the eastern and western bends of the Barak, we will give up all claim ... give him the line of the Jiri and the western bend of the Barak as a boundary, provided the Raja agrees to the whole of what is written in this paper ...”.

Maharaja Gambhir Singh accepted those terms. All the provisions of the above treaty with the exception of the last remained in force². The last one became inoperative when the British officer connected with the Manipur Levy was withdrawn.

The terms of the above treaty speak of mainly trade and military alliance between the Manipur and the British Governments. The latter being more powerful might often have its will prevail upon the former on common matters.

But Manipur was undoubtedly free from any political bondage during the time of Gambhir Singh and Nar Singh. Government of India was wise enough to allow Manipur to exist as an independent state between the two frontiers of the British and the Burmese. The presence of Manipur levy, financed by the British Government and commanded by British officers, within the state may offer a scope for speculation on Manipur's sovereignty. The circumstances under which the Manipur Levy was raised have already been stated in the previous chapter. The necessity of the Manipur Levy from the British side ended after the annexation of Cachar and conclusion of the Anglo-Manipur treaty of 1833. It was retained one year more under British control for the prevention of any uprising in Manipur, which might follow the death of Gambhir Singh. After one year when it was found that Nar Singh was capable of maintaining peace, the command and responsibility of the Manipur Levy was handed over to the Manipur Government in 1835³. Major Grant, Commandant of the Levy, after handing over his charge, left Manipur. Capt. Gordon who had been serving as adjutant since 1827, was appointed by the British Government as Political Agent in Manipur. Besides him another British officer Capt. Pemberton was then serving in Manipur. He entered Manipur in 1825 along with

Gambhir Singh and since then he had been busy in collecting information about Manipur. In 1835, he was appointed by the British Government as Joint Commissioner in Manipur⁴. He was posted by the British Government "for preservation of a friendly intercourse and as a medium of communication with the Manipur Government and as occasion may require, with the Burmese authorities on the frontier and more especially to prevent border feuds, which might lead to hostilities between the Manipuries and the Burmese"⁵. It is quite evident that the duty of the Political Agent in Manipur was like that of an Ambassador. Mr. Gordon remained as Political Agent in Manipur till his death in 1844. He was succeeded by McCulloch. As long as Nar Singh lived the Political Agent maintained strict neutrality in the internal political affairs of Manipur. Their business also was not affected by occasional political uprisings⁶.

CONSPIRACY OF MAHARANI KUMUDINI DEVI

Maharani Kumudini Devi was the mother of Prince Chandra Kirti. When Gambhir Singh died Chandra Kirti was only two years old. The Maharani always had an apprehension lest the regent Nar Singh should finally usurp the throne⁷. There was, of course, no cause for such apprehension. The Maharani and her son were looked after with due honour. Debendra Singh, a brother of Nar Singh, was very much jealous of the power and prosperity of Nar Singh. But in view of the popularity enjoyed by Nar Singh it was not possible for him to bring about his fall by a direct action. So he thought it best to set the Maharani against the Regent. Some of his agents became successful in convincing her that Nar Singh would soon banish or murder Chandra Kirti and formally ascend the throne. The Maharani who had already such suspicion in her mind, blindly fell into that trap⁸. She soon won over Thangal, Paosang, Mantriamayum Nabin Singh. Nabin Singh, suggested by Debendra Singh presented before the Maharani a plot to murder Nar Singh and got her approval. Debendra however, remained always behind the scene without involving himself directly in all those affairs. His idea was that if Nar Singh was killed he could easily occupy the throne by removing Chandra Kirti. But in case the plan failed Chandra Kirti with his mother would surely be

banished. He would therefore remain safe, and after the death of Nar Singh there would be no difficulty in his ascending the throne.

In 1844, one day while Nar Singh was deeply engaged in meditation in the temple of Govindaji, Nabin Singh, according to the preconceived plan went there to murder him. Fortunately Nar Singh could escape with his life though severely injured. Nabin Singh was caught and beheaded by the guards then and there⁹. According to the treaty of 1833 a road was being constructed from Jirighat to Bishnupur with the co-operation of the Government of Manipur and under the supervision of Capt. Guthrie since 1837. The work continued up to 1844¹⁰ while Nar Singh was attacked by Nabin Singh; neither the Political Agent Capt. Gordon nor his assistant was in the valley. They had been away to visit the construction of the new road. After the failure of that plot the Maharani with her son accompanied by Thangal and Paosang made her way to Cachar and placed herself and the son under the protection of the British. At the time of their flight they avoided the new road. So the Political Agent or his assistant did not meet them on the way¹¹. Nar Singh "suspecting the complicity of the Maharani in the attempt on his life did not hesitate to proclaim himself Raja and although the British Government were not quite satisfied with the arrangement it was allowed to pass"¹².

LARGE SCALE ENTRANCE OF KUKIS INTO MANIPUR

The Kukis are a wandering race consisting of several tribes, different from the Manipuris and the Nagas. "Their original home cannot be correctly ascertained, but there seem to be traces of them as far south as the Malaya peninsula". They were first heard of as Kukis, in Manipur, between 1830 and 1840; though tribes of the same race had long been subject to the Raja of Manipur. The new immigrants began to pour into the hill tracts of Manipur from the south in large numbers driving away other inhabitants. Nar Singh had just then formally ascended the throne and there were still changes of internal quarrels. Under these circumstances it was not possible for him to cope with the situation. He sought the co-operation of the Political Agent McCulloch. Mr. McCulloch noticed that Kukis had been driven

north by more powerful tribes and that their first object was to secure land for cultivation. As they arrived, he settled them down in different places on the exposed frontier. McCulloch advanced them large sums from his own pocket, assigning different duties to each chief's followers. Some were made into irregular troops. Thus within a short period thousands of fierce Kukis were settled down as peaceful subjects of Manipur. McCulloch's success in this affair was highly appreciated—both by the Government of Manipur and the British¹³.

THE MAHARANI'S APPEAL TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

It has already been mentioned that the Maharani with prince Chandra Kirti, arriving at Cachar, placed themselves under the protection of the British Government. A small guard of sepoys was appointed for their security. For their support an allowance of Rs. 100/- was granted to them from the Kubo compensation money. They stayed nearly five years at Cachar. During this period the Maharani, made many applications to the British to restore the throne to Chandra Kirti. The British government at that time did not like to interfere in the internal affairs of Manipur and remained silent. The Maharani, thinking that the assistance of Capt. Jenkins, Commissioner of Assam, might be useful for her cause, proceeded to Assam to consult with him. After she had some correspondence with him, she was advised to refer the matter to the Political Agent of Manipur. Thus spending nearly a year in Assam she returned to Cachar, where she remained until the death of Nar Singh in 1850¹⁴.

DEATH OF NAR SINGH

In the year 1850, cholera broke out in the Manipur valley in epidemic form. Large numbers of people died of it. Maharaja Nar Singh was also attacked with it and was taken in its toll. His brother, "Debendra Singh, a man of less firmness and talent than Nar Singh, assumed the Raj, it is said in the Political Agent's correspondence of the time at the request of Nar Singh. According to the Manipuri authorities, Nar Singh was not in favour of his succession; and desired the restoration of Gambhir

Singh's son Chandra Kirti Singh. He is said also to have exhorted his three sons to proceed to Cachar, and render every assistance in their power to further this end." Debendra Singh however, did not lose a moment to capture the power as soon as Nar Singh died. The three sons of Nar Singh immediately fled to Cachar and were reported to be in communication with the party of the Chandra Kirti Singh¹⁵.

The ancestors of Brahmin families bearing the titles of "Brajamayum" and 'Anoubam' came to Manipur during the time of Gambhir Singh; those of 'Kulinmayum' and 'Gosainmayum' came during the time of Nar Singh. A certain Brahmin came from Shantipur. He came to be known as Brajamayum since he worshipped Gopalji. 'Anoubam' came from a Brahmin family of Agartala. Kulinmayum came from a 'Kulin' Bandopadhyaya family of Barahanagar near Calcutta. 'Gosainmayum' also came from Shantipur from a Goswami family. Acharya Brahmin also came from Kharadaha in Assam. In Manipur he came to be known as 'Warilibam'—meaning story-teller¹⁶.

Maharaja Nar Singh was a patron of Kirtan. The style of Kirtan known as 'Nipa-palla' was highly developed in his time. All the participants of this kirtan are males. They put on large turban 'mala' and large folded cloth. The idea of that 'palla' kirtan originated from Thakur Krishnadas Goswami. The princesses of the royal family used to participate in 'Jala-keli' (devotional play in water) and 'Rasheswari-palla'. Generally the princesses of Nar Singh's family used to perform 'Jala-keli' acting as Krishna and Radha and throwing water on each others' bodies. The princesses of Jai Singh's family preferred to play 'Rasha' with Sri Krishna singing the songs of 'Rasheswaripalla'¹⁷. Nar Singh thus not belonging to the direct royal line enjoyed the warmth of his people's heart on account of his versatile qualities and contributions. His descendants also bear the title of Rajkumar.

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- ⁹ *Ibid*
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- ¹¹ R. Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*
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- ¹⁴ R. Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*
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- ¹⁶ *Bijoy Panchali*, Part II. pp. 10-11
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CHAPTER IX

MAHARAJA CHANDRA KIRTI SINGH

AT the time of Nar Singh's death Chandra Kirti was nearly 18 years old. About this time he petitioned to the Government of India for the restoration of his throne. But before any reply had reached him, he eluded the guards and marched towards Manipur—accompanied by Nar Singh's three sons. Near the Jirighat his party was strengthened by more recruits. From there he sent a letter to the Political Agent intimating his intention of entering into Manipur. Debendra Singh who sat on the throne of Manipur had no popularity. When Chandra Kirti appeared on the scene, the prestige of his being the only male descendant of Gambhir Singh, who had freed the country from the Burmese, told immensely in his favour. The presence of Nar Singh's sons in his camp had also a favourable effect, as tending to unite the two great factions of the country—the supporters of Gambhir Singh's family and of Nar Singh's. Hence Chandra Kirti met with but little opposition on the way and reached the valley safely. After trifling skirmish he captured the Langthabal palace built by his father, three miles south of the capital. For five days matters remained quiet. Many of the followers of Debendra Singh deserted him and went over to the side of Chandra Kirti whose advent was apparently approved by the majority of the people. The last resort of Debendra Singh was the army, which also at the last moment betrayed him. After 5 days Debendra having been attacked by his own troops fled to Cachar. Thus after a period of 3 months his reign came to an end. When Debendra ascended the throne, the Political Agent wrote to the Government of India to recognise him as the ruler of Manipur. "This recognition was accorded, but as it arrived eleven days after Debendra's flight, it could not be acted on, and was not made known."

Debendra Singh having fled, Chandra Kirti ascended

the throne and appointed Bhuban Singh and Setu Singh, two sons of Nar Singh as "Jubaraj" and "Senapati" respectively. The Political Agent could not have much faith in the durability of this arrangement. He informed his government that the alliance of Chandra Kirti Singh with Nar Singh's sons was not likely to continue and feared that the young king from his ignorance of the country will fall entirely into the hands of his advisers, a predicament which will ultimately result in oppression and misery to the subjects. In view of this the Government of India, except withholding the Kubo compensation money, remained indifferent to the affairs of Manipur for the time being.

Within a fortnight of Debendra Singh's flight, Chandra Kirti was faced with a trouble from his own camp, as anticipated by the Political Agent. A brother of Debendra Singh, who was still in the valley made an alliance with Nar Singh's sons with 6 hundred followers and delivered an attack on the capital. But they were defeated and driven out.

Debendra Singh after escaping to Cachar informed the Government of India that he would make an attempt to recover the throne. This also made the situation for the British more complicated to recognise Chandra Kirti Singh as the Ruler of Manipur. After two months of his flight Debendra Singh made his first attempt to recover the throne. But his forces were defeated and dispersed by the troops of Chandra Kirti. He again retreated to Cachar.

In the mean time, the affairs in Manipur were going from bad to worse. Unscrupulous officials taking advantage of the inexperience of young ruler and his unstable position due to the threat of Debendra's moves, only thought of enriching themselves at the expense of the unfortunate inhabitants. The majority of the people became extremely discontented with the rule of Chandra Kirti Singh. This was the moment chosen by Debendra Singh to try his second chance. He might have been successful this time. But the border forces on the British side prevented his move and arrested him. He was first brought to Cachar and then sent to Dacca, where he died in 1871. An allowance of Rs. 70/- per month was granted to him from the Kubo compensation money¹.

MISUNDERSTANDING WITH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

The attitude of Chandra Kirti and his advisers was at this period one of decided hostility to the Political Agent. He was accused of keeping back the Kubo compensation allowance, though it was made clear to them that in this respect he was only carrying out the orders of the government which were to remain in force "until it could be clearly shown that the Raja was able to hold his own". In spite of it they resented it so much that they openly gave out that if they did not receive the allowance when the next instalment became due, they would reoccupy the Kubo valley. Chandra Kirti probably could not forget the indifference of the British Government to the repeated requests he had made to restore the throne of Manipur to him. At last when he managed to secure it purely by his own prowess the suspension of the Kubo compensation and delay in announcing formal recognition to him as the Head of Manipur State further aggrieved him.

The Political Agent, however, believed that Chandra Kirti would finally be able to realise his real strength and position and avoid any extreme step. But he apprehended that the continued unsettled state of the country might induce the Burmese to interfere and assist one Prince Nibirjit who was then in high favour with the court of Ava.

In December 1850, matters at length came to a head. The government of Manipur supplied arms and men to Naga tribes in the north hostile to the British Government. When it was detected, "Government administered a rebuke to the Manipur Raja, and reminded him that his state existed only by the sufferance and countenance of the British Government." On receipt of this strong note Chandra Kirti Singh abjured all hostile activities and preferred to re-establish friendly relationship with the British. He also paid his attention to the well-being of his subjects². Afterwards "in February 1851, the orders of the Government recognising the succession of Chandra Kirti Singh to the Raj of Manipur were conveyed to him." This was followed by another assurance of stability from the Government of India, which undertook to guarantee the Raj to him and his descendants, and to prevent, by force of arms, if necessary, any attempt by rival chiefs to dislodge him³.

Shortly after this declaration, some of the sons of Debendra Singh and Nar Singh again made a vain attempt to overthrow Chandra Kirti. Following their example two sons of Madhu Chandra and Kanai Singh, a son of Marjit, also made an attempt to capture power. But they were defeated. Of them the two sons of Madhu Chandra were captured. Only Kanai Singh could escape. After these disturbances the Court of Directors of the East India Co., in a despatch dated May 5th, 1852 confirmed the order of the Government of India and advised the Political Agent thus "The position you have assumed of pledged protection of the Rajah imposes on you as a necessary consequence the obligation of attempting to guide him by your advice, but, if needful, of protecting his subjects against oppression on his part; otherwise our guarantee of his rule may be the cause of inflicting on them a continuance of reckless tyranny."

This indicates how stealthily and steadily the British had gained the upper hand in the domestic affairs of Manipur reducing the status of the state to a nominal independence. But the professed intention of the Court of Directors to protect the subjects of Manipur against oppression was never translated into action. Formerly the tyranny of the rulers was limited by the uprisings of the people but when the British power stood behind the throne of Manipur they never cared to think of introducing any reform. The British also finding their interests quite safe allowed the ruler to go on with his administration as usual⁴.

MANIPUR AT THE TIME OF SEPOY MUTINY

The mutiny which broke out in India in 1857 spread its flame in the direction of Manipur also. The 34th N. I. mutinied at Chittagong in November 1857, and marched northwards through Sylhet and Cachar, hoping to raise these districts against the British in an attempt in which they failed. They were met and defeated at Latu by the combined efforts of S.L.I. and the North Cachar Hills F.P. The mutineers afterwards continued on their way east in the direction of the Manipur frontier⁵. Some of the Manipuri Princes who were in Cachar joined with these mutineers. Among them was Nurendrajit Singh alias Sna Chahi Ahum a younger son of Chaurajit Singh⁶. "It is said, though the authority is not definite, that the Tangal general, an old man

who with the Senapati was hanged for the Manipur Rebellion in 1891, was one of the 34th N.I. mutineers who escaped and took service in that state”⁷. McCulloch, the Political Agent of Manipur, on hearing of the Chittagong Mutiny, asked Chandra Kirti to send a body of his troops to the frontier to prevent the mutineers from entering the country. This was at once done. Four hundred men under Majors were despatched. They captured a number of the mutineers, who were handed over to the British. Nearly all the mutineers were killed, captured or perished miserably in the jungles of Manipur and Kuki hills⁸. Manipur then had no reason to be sympathetic to the cause of the Sepoy Mutiny. It is found in the report of the Political Agent that the conduct and feelings of the Raja and the majority of the officials and inhabitants were at that time good and the Raja’s offer of assistance to the British Government in case of need sincere. Narendrajit along with other Manipuri Princes who tried to take advantage of the mutiny were made prisoners and handed over to the British officers, who eventually transported them.” But though the Manipuris were not sympathetic to the mutiny, attempt to enlist men as sepoys within the state by the British Government for general service totally failed⁹.

After the Sepoy Mutiny, in 1859, Chandra Kirti Singh, at the recommendation of the Political Agent was presented by the British Government with a dress of honour, sword and a belt for his active co-operation with the British during the mutiny. Eight of his chief officers received “Killuts”. Roma Singh, one of the Majors who had been engaged against the mutineers received the mutiny medal¹⁰.

ATTEMPTS OF DIFFERENT PRINCES ON THE THRONE

Even after the mutiny, the reign of Chandra Kirti was disturbed by the different ambitious scions of the royal family who from time to time attempted to seize the power. But the close alliance of Chandra Kirti with the British helped him to deal with them very easily. Mypak, a descendant of Gharib Niwaz, attempted first, in 1859, then again in 1862, to dislodge Chandra Kirti. Last time he was wounded and captured. In 1864 Kanai Singh, son of Marjit accompanied by about 200 followers, tried to enter

into Manipur. But he was defeated by the 33rd Native Infantry and Police near the Jiri river. In 1866 Gokul Singh, a son of Debendra Singh entered Manipur from Cachar with one hundred followers. The forces of Chandra Kirti defeated them. Gokul Singh escaped but was finally arrested at Cooch Behar in 1868 and sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment. Kanai Singh also was arrested in the mean time. Both Kanai Singh and Gokul Singh were sent to Hazaribagh. Each of them was granted a pension of Rs. 200 per month by the Manipur government. After the attempt of Gokul Singh in 1866 there remained no other important prince within the British territory to venture an attack on Manipur. Debendra Singh died in 1871. One of his sons Nirjit Singh and a nephew Shaikar Singh resided at Dacca. Durjai Singh an elder brother of Kanai Singh resided at Agartala; but he had no ambition for the throne¹¹.

CHANDRA KIRTI'S HELP TO THE BRITISH AGAINST THE NAGAS OF KOHIMA

Geographically there is no line of demarcation between Manipur and Naga hills. A kind of vague boundary between the two had been laid down in 1842, by Lt. Biggs from the British side and Capt. Gordon on the part of the Manipur government. But the Nagas of that locality never cared for that Biggs-Gordon line. The British also was not very particular in enforcing laws on their side of the border. At last in 1851 the Government of India utterly sick of Naga affairs allowed the Manipur Government to extend its authority over the Naga villages on the other side of the Biggs-Gordon line. It has already been stated that the rule of Manipur once extended over the Naga hills. Naturally Manipur was not satisfied when the new line deprived her of a large portion of the hilly region. Finally she was to some extent consoled by the revision of that line¹².

The British-occupied Naga Hills was under the administration of an English Political Agent, stationed at Samagudting. But practically his rule was confined to Samagudting and few other neighbouring villages. There were always some petty incidents between the Nagas of administrated and unadministrated areas. In 1877 when a serious trouble arose with the Mozzuma village, James Johnstone, the then Political Agent of Manipur along with

Balaram Singh, a minister of that state, proceeded with an army from Manipur to help the Political Agent of the Naga hills. No sooner had they gone half the way than a report came that the Raja of Sumjok, a vassal of Burma invaded a border outpost at Kongal within the territory of Manipur and killed 8 men. This created a stir within the state. On receiving the information Johnstone returned to Imphal and along with Thangal Major proceeded towards Kongal and after making an inquiry about the incident, he submitted a report to the Government of India holding Burma responsible for that unprovoked incursion. He also further added that "failure to do justice would eventually lead to underhand reprisals on the part of Manipur, as the Durbar could not understand our government tolerating an attack of this kind on a protected state and naturally ascribed our forbearance to weakness"¹³. This kind of border incident and dispute over the border line between Manipur and Burma continued up to 1881. Finally the Government of India appointed Johnstone as commissioner to settle that question. In spite of non-co-operation from the Burmese he could successfully draw a line between the two states, which proved lasting.

The army which proceeded along with Johnstone to help the Political Agent of the Naga hills in quelling the trouble at Mozzuma village in 1877 stayed on the Frontier till the restoration of peace. The rebel Nagas once approached Chandra Kirti to support their movement. They had a notion that in between the British and Manipur the latter was a stronger power. Chandra Kirti not only refused to give them any help but also warned them that if they did not surrender immediately a strong force would be sent against them from Manipur. The rebellion of Mozzuma afterwards gradually subsided¹⁴.

In 1878 Mr. Damant, the Political Agent of Naga Hills shifted the administrative headquarters from Samagudting to Kohima. Since then trouble started with the Angami Nagas. In the month of October 1879 news reached Manipur that the Angamis invaded the administrative headquarters at Kohima. Johnstone already knew that there were not enough forces and rations there at that time. He approached Chandra Kirti Singh for immediate military assistance. In the mean time, Johnstone received a letter from Mr. Cowley, Assistant Political Agent of the Naga Hills. It was in fact an S.O.S. call conveying the news of the death of Mr.

Damant and the grave situation prevailing there necessitating immediate rescue. Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh unhesitatingly complied with the request of Johnstone and sent 2000 soldiers under the commands of his eldest son Sura Chandra, third son Tikendrajit (alias Koireng) and Thangal Major; 34 sepoys of 34th B.I. and 50 men of Cachar Police who were then at the Residency also accompanied them along with Johnstone.

The Angami rebellion of Kohima spread like wild fire. Anti-British feeling affected quite a large number of Naga villages and it spread even inside Manipur. It was realised when the army from Manipur reached Mythebum. In view of the situation Tikendrajit and Thangal Major expressed their reluctance to advance further without sufficient reinforcement from Manipur. Johnstone, however, became desperate and rapidly marched forward along with Sura Chandra and his forces. They soon reached Kohima and rescued the British Camp there. Tikendrajit and Thangal Major after some deliberations between them revised their decision and proceeded towards Kohima without further waiting for reinforcements. They also reached Kohima on that very day. On hearing of their arrival, the Nagas were extremely terrified. This helped the gradual restoration of normalcy¹⁵. Had the British not received such unstinted support from Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh in such a critical moment not only the British camp at Kohima would have been destroyed but also they would surely have been made to quit from the entire tribal area of Assam. James Johnstone who was the eye-witness of these events recorded thus "It is difficult to overestimate our obligation to the Maharaja for his loyal conduct during the insurrection and subsequent troubles. According to his own belief, we had deprived him of territory belonging to him, and which he had been allowed to claim as his own. The Nagas asked him to help them, and promised to become his feudatories, if only he would not act against them. The temptation must have been strong, to at least serve us as we deserved, by leaving us in the lurch to get out of the mess as best as we could. Instead of this, Chandra Kirti Singh loyally and cheerfully placed his resources at our disposal, and certainly by enabling me to march to its relief, prevented the fall of Kohima, and the disastrous result which would have inevitably followed."

HILL PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT OF MANIPUR

Before the introduction of modern fire-arms at the time of the Burmese war the government of Manipur had very little control over its hill people. Internecine warfare was almost constant among the hill tribes. Sometimes their marauding bands used to come down to valley also. But they were both unwilling and unable to stay in the valley for a long time in the face of strong cavalry charge. For these reasons communications between Manipur and their neighbouring states were extremely difficult and unsafe. Only large armed bodies of men could go with any safety from Manipur valley towards Cachar. During the invasion of the Burmese, the hill men fled far away from their lines of advance. All the hill tribes were unfriendly to the Burmese and lost no opportunity of annoying them. Many Burmese soldiers lost their lives in the hills of Manipur at the time of their retreat. After the Burmese war Gambhir Singh turned his attention to the subjugation of the hill tribes. With the aid of fire-arms, he speedily reduced the Kowpois, Luhupas and Angami Nagas and brought them under fair order¹⁶.

REBELLION IN CHASSAD VILLAGE

By the end of December 1879, report came to Imphal that Tonghoo, leader of the Kukis of Chassad village (eastern side of Manipur) at the instigation of the Sumjok Raja, declared independence and ravaged the neighbouring Chingsow village. Johnstone, requested by the Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh, went there with a force and shortly brought them under control. Since then Chassad remained always law-abiding and faithful to the rulers of Manipur¹⁷. In 1891 after the Manipur rebellion "when the British spies were in search of Regent Kulachandra, he found asylum amongst the Kukis of Chassad village.

K.C.S.I. TO MAHARAJA CHANDRA KIRTI SINGH

Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh helped the British Government on different occasions. Finally in January 1880 when the Merma tribe attacked the Baldan tea factory the Maharaja at the request of Johnstone sent 200 Manipuri soldiers to the aid of

the administrative authority of Cachar¹⁸. In recognition of his friendship and help in 1880 on the 20th February, the Chief Commissioner of Assam Sir Stuart Bayley came to Manipur to confer on him the 'Star of India'. After performance of due ceremonies in honour of the Chief Commissioner the star and badge of K.C.S.I. were awarded to the Maharaja in a general meeting of the 'Darbar'. After witnessing the game of Polo and dances for some days the Chief Commissioner returned to Assam. The people of Manipur were extremely pleased by this conferment of K.C.S.I. on their Maharaja¹⁹.

NATURAL CALAMITIES

In 1880 Manipur suffered from two successive natural calamities. On the 30th June a violent earthquake levelled many houses to the ground, the palace at Langthabal was greatly damaged, part of the old Residency was thrown off. The earthquake was followed by the severest outbreak of cholera. There were many deaths in the palace and public business was at a standstill. The meetings of the Darbar could not be held for a long time due to the absence of members. The great bazar was closed at sunset. Everywhere on the banks of the rivers and streams, rows of funeral pyres might be seen day and night. "Amid this trouble, the attitude of all classes was such as to excite admiration, there were no cases of sick being deserted and everyone appeared calm and collected"²⁰.

When the cholera disappeared, the Maharaja was taken ill with an abcess behind the ear. Great apprehensions were entertained for his life. Fear of a struggle for the throne in case of his death kept the capital in a state of alarm for weeks. The four eldest sons, and also some members of the family of the late Raja Nar Singh, had their followers armed to assert their several claims immediately the Maharaja died. The Maharaja himself became very restless about the conduct of his sons. Johnstone in conjunction with Thangal Major, as a precautionary measure, arranged to secure the guns and bring them over to the Residency the moment he died. The Jubraj was asked by the Political Agent to come over to the Residency at once, in the event of the death of his father, so that he might be immediately proclaimed as the Maharaja. But fortunately the Maharaja recovered that time²¹.

When the Maharaja was again able to transact business "he begged me (Johnstone) to write to the Government of India and request that the Jutaraj should be acknowledged by them as his successor". Both Johnstone and the Jubraj wanted that the guarantee should be extended to the Jubraj's children so as to preclude the possibility of a disputed succession on his death. But the Maharaja preferred adhering to the old Manipuri custom, which allowed the succession of all the sons one after another when the last one died, then his children succeeded as children of the last Raja to the exclusion of all the elder brothers' children. This system really seemed to encourage strife. In response to the request of the Maharaja, supported by Johnstone, the Government of India agreed to guarantee the Jubraj's succession and maintain him on the throne²².

By the end of September 1780, when the Maharaja had almost fully recovered Johnstone one day met him and presented him with Her Majesty's warrant, appointing him a "Knight Commander of the Star of India".

"The papers bearing the Queen's signature were received with a salute of thirty-one guns, and the Maharaja rose to take it from my (Johnstone) hand, and at once placed it on his forehead making an obeisance"²³.

IMPHAL-MAO ROAD

Till 1880 there was no regular road from Imphal to Mao. When Johnstone had gone to Kohima he had to experience great difficulties in absence of any road. Hence, realising the necessity of at least a cart road from Imphal to Mao, he induced the Maharaja to take initiative in this respect. The construction of the road was completed in January 1881, under the supervision of Lt. Raban R.E.²⁴. The importance of that road was fully realised during the second Anglo-Burmese War. In course of time Imphal-Mao Road was further improved and extended up to Dimapur. Formerly traders and pilgrims from Manipur used to travel by the Imphal-Cachar Road. But after the improvement and extension of the Imphal-Mao Road, the Manipuris preferred to travel by that way. Consequently it opened communication between Manipur and Assam.

PREDOMINANCE OF THANGAL MAJOR

In 1881 a man named Eerengha claiming to be of Royal lineage rose in rebellion against the Manipur Government. He was soon captured and beheaded²⁵. This was the first execution for treason since the execution of Melairomba during the time of Nar Singh. In 1882 Johnstone went to England on a long leave. During his absence Thangal Major taking advantage of the illness of the Maharaja came to the fore-front and became the most influential man in the state. He assumed the post of "Aya Pooiel", i.e. Minister for Burmese affairs. There were many complaints from different quarters against his excesses. Minister Balaram Singh and Jubaraj Sur Chandra were his opponents. At the end of leave when Johnstone returned to Manipur he found that Thangal Major had become an extremely difficult person to deal with. On May 23rd 1885, the Government of Burma complained that some murders had been committed by Manipuri subjects. Johnstone felt sure that the outrage had been carried out at the instigation of Thangal Major, as a set-off against the Kongal case. He along with Balaram Singh had gone on the spot and after necessary investigation submitted a report to the Maharaja holding Thangal Major responsible for the incident and at the same time suggesting his removal from the post of the Aya Pooiel. Thangal Major though he was adamant at the beginning finally in view of the firm attitude of the Maharaja relinquished his post. Sura Chandra and Balaram Singh were very much pleased at this²⁶.

SECOND ANGLO-BURMESE WAR

In 1885 during the second Anglo-Burmese war when the British forces had attacked north Burma, some English employees of the Bombay-Burma Corporation were held up in the Chindwin forests. In order to rescue them Johnstone proceeded from Imphal with two thousand Manipuri soldiers and occupied Kedet province in Burma. Within 20 days of the declaration of the war, the capital Mandalay along with the emperor Thibaw fell into the British hands. Johnstone with his Manipuri forces not only captured Kedet but also was able to maintain order in that province. Lord Dufferin, the then Viceroy of India, highly praised the Manipuris for their valuable co-operation²⁷.

FINAL DEPARTURE OF JOHNSTONE FROM MANIPUR

Johnstone finally retired from Manipur in March 1886. There was a proposal to send him there for another term but due to illness he could not accept it. By his services Johnstone won great admiration from the people of Manipur. At every time, when he returned to Manipur after leave, large numbers of people used to come to greet him. As long as he remained in Manipur his counsel was indispensable to the Maharaja on every important affair of the state.

He was always conscious about the interests of Manipur. When the trouble started in the Naga hills he ran first against the Sumjok Raja who had invaded a border outpost of Manipur, instead of proceeding immediately towards the Naga hills to help the Political Agent of that place. He showed his interest in the development of industries also. It was at his suggestion that some Manipuris were sent to Kanpur to learn weaving of carpet. He initiated improved method of pottery at Imphal and also encouraged the silversmiths to produce better types of utensils and ornaments. Due to his effort many kinds of severe punishments for petty offences were abolished. He also tried to introduce modern system of education but for various reasons it did not succeed. His book "My Experience in Manipur and the Naga Hills" is a valuable source of information regarding the history of Manipur of his time. The then history of Manipur cannot be properly reconstructed without mentioning the achievements of Johnstone. He was one of those illustrious British officials who by their services made the British administration popular and beneficial to the people of India. Had he remained in Manipur for a longer period the tragic incident of 1891 might have been avoided.

PERSONALITY AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF CHANDRA KIRTI

Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh was a thick-set man of about five feet five inches in height. He was fair and had the features of the Indo-Chinese race. He was very sensible and obliging and was of a mild disposition. "He had a great taste for mechanical arts of all kinds, and a vast fund of information which he had acquired from the Englishmen who came in contact with him. Scientific works were explained to him and his researches extend-

ed even to the anatomy of the human body, of which he had a very fair knowledge. He had a glass manufactured in his workshop, and once sent me (Johnstone) a petroleum lamp, every portion of which was made by his own artificers. His rule, for such a strong man, was mild as compared with that of his predecessors, and he thoroughly realised that his prosperity depended on his loyalty to the British government. At the same time, he was most tenacious of his rights, and earnestly desired to preserve his country intact and to give us no excuse for annexing it." The fear of annexation of his state by the British was so great in his mind that, once when Johnstone thought of growing a little tea for his own consumption, he became much agitated. The example of the annexation of Muttuk country in 1840 for tea plantation was fresh in his mind. Hence he apprehended that if once it was demonstrated that tea could be successfully grown in Manipur, tea planters would come up and there would be a cry for annexation²⁸.

Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh was deeply interested in religious matters. Ramgati Vidyalankar, a saintly person of Sylhet, visited Manipur in his time. The Maharaja as a token of his regard for Lord Gouranga sent along with Vidyalankar a brass bell weighing 2 mds to be presented to the "Sri Mandir" in the ancestral house of Lord Gouranga²⁹. Once Brahmananda Puri, a powerful 'Tantrik' monk visited his court at his request to clarify some religious points. Probably the worship of the goddess 'Kali' was first introduced in Manipur at that time³⁰. Chandra Kirti's religious view was free from dogmatism. His Muslim subjects were fairly treated in his dominion. It was the custom of all subjects to pay their respects to the Maharaja by bowing down before him. When Chandra Kirti knew that it was against Islam, he exempted the Muslims from bowing down and allowed them to do only 'Salam'. He conferred the title of 'Nawab' on the leader of the Muslim community who were then about five thousand in number³¹.

After a reign of 35 years Maharaja Chandra Kirti died in 1886 at the age of 54. It is found in the report of R. Brown that Maharani Kumudini Devi, the mother of Chandra Kirti was alive till 1873.

Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh was in all respects one of the greatest rulers of Manipur. But his commitments to the British

government and too much dependence on them do not seem to be befitting of an independent ruler. He relied much on the British Political Agent Johnstone; he accepted titles from the British government. All these activities show that he practically failed to maintain his independent status. To clarify the de facto status of Manipur, a comparison may be drawn between the treatment received by the British Political Agent in Manipur and his counterpart in Burma. Johnstone writes:

“... at the entrance of the capital, I was met by the Maharaja himself, surrounded by all his sons. A carpet was spread with chairs for him and myself. We both of us having descended from our elephants, advanced and met in the centre of the carpet, and having made our salutations (a salute of eleven guns was fired in my honour), we sat and talked for two minutes. We then mounted the Maharaja’s elephant being driven by his 3rd son; and we rode together through the great bazar, till our roads diverged at the entrance to the fortified enclosure to the palace when we took leave of each other. ...

“After a day’s rest I paid a visit to the Maharaja, having first stipulated as to my proper reception. I was received by the Jubaraj (heir apparent) at the entrance to the private part of the palace and by the Maharaja a few paces from the entrance to the Darbar room (hall of reception) and conducted by him to a seat opposite to his own, with a table between us, his sons and officials being seated on either side. I read the Viceroy’s letter, informing the Maharaja of my appointment. ... I took my leave and was escorted back to the place where I was met on my arrival”³².

Whereas “according to the Burmese custom the British Resident, when attending court had to remove his shoes and kneel before the king”³³.

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CHAPTER X

THE POLITICAL AGENCY

THE British Political Agent was first appointed in Manipur in 1835. The nature and scope of the agency have already been stated in a previous chapter. The power and responsibility of the Political Agent were further increased by the declarations of the Government of India in 1851 and in 1852, and also by the strong personalities of the incumbents like Gordon, McCulloch and Johnstone. During the period of their agencies there was no important event in Manipur in which they were not either directly or indirectly connected. After the death of Gordon in 1844, McCulloch was appointed as Political Agent in his place. The activities of Gorden have already been stated in a previous chapter. McCulloch completed his first term as Political Agent and left Manipur in 1861. It was at this time, the Civil Finance Commission under the presidency of Sir Richard Temple proposed the abolition of the Political Agency at Manipur. It at once had an evil effect in Manipur¹. "Every British subject made arrangements to leave. Trade with Burma almost ceased. Unoffending Nagas and Kukis who had been induced by former Political Agents to come down from their hills, were seized and enslaved"². Accordingly the proposal had to be dropped. The Government of India sent Dr. Dillon as Political Agent in 1862. But shortly the Maharaja brought several charges against him. Due to his inefficiency, the government removed him in 1863. Since the removal of Dr Dillon the post of the Political Agent in Mapipur remained vacant for some time. The Maharaja applied to the government to send another Political Agent³. "The past history of the country shows that peace, order and comparative prosperity reigned while the British Agent was present. Lastly, but not the least, both the chief himself and his people desire to have a British Agent amongst them ; they have told Capt. Stewart that the presence

of one is equal to a brigade as regards the security of the country"⁴. In view of this McCulloch was again sent as Political Agent in Manipur. He soon restored the prestige of the Agency and its business ran smoothly till 1867 when he retired finally. Since his retirement till the appointment of Johnstone in 1876, within this period of 9 years, the Political Agents who came to Manipur were mostly inefficient and failed to maintain friendly relationship with the Government of Manipur. In 1872 the Government of Manipur brought charges against the Political Agent Col. Thomson. But they could not be substantiated by facts. In 1876 charges were again brought against Colnel. Thomson which were found by the Government of India to be entirely false. Again, complaints were made to Col. Keatings, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, against the Political Agent Dr. Brown. Col. Shere, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang was sent to enquire about the charges. While the enquiries were being made Dr. Brown died. But he already handed over his statement before his death. This time also the Government of Manipur failed to produce sufficient evidence in support of their charges. A severe reproof was in consequence transmitted from the Government of India to the Raja⁵. After the death of Dr. Brown Capt. Durand had been appointed to officiate as Political Agent. He gave the following account of the position of the political agent.

"The Political Agent is dependent on the will and pleasure of the Maharaja for everything. His very word and movement are known to the Maharaja. He is in fact a British Officer under Manipur surveillance. If the Mahajara is not pleased with the Political Agent he cannot get anything, he is ostracised, from bad coarse black atta which the Maharaja sells him as a favour, the dhobi who washes his clothes and the Nagas who work in his garden ; he cannot purchase anything at any price. The court is almost openly hostile, though they have pliancy enough to pretend to a great regard for the Political Agent and the Sirkar"⁶.

In 1872-73 at the time of the demarcation of the boundary between Manipur and the Naga Hills, the Government of Manipur offered every possible obstruction. The Political Agent was expressly forbidden to enter into the eastern portion of the state. For such conduct "the Maharaja was sternly

called to account, by the Supreme Government and was required to submit an ample apology for his improper conduct”⁷.

After the retirement of McCulloch it became a problem for the Government of India to find a suitable man for the post of the Political Agent of Manipur. Nobody was willing to go to that inaccessible country. As a result the Government of India had to meet with many troubles regarding Manipur. Finally by the end of 1876, when Johnstone accepted that post all those troubles came to an end. “Manipur, to which Colonel Johnstone was appointed in 1877, was called by one of the Indian secretaries the Cinderella among political Agencies”. “They’ll never”, he said, “get a good man to take it”. ‘Well’ was the reply ‘a good man has taken it now’⁸.

Long before his appointment in Manipur, Johnstone established his fame through his activities among the tribal and backward people. As special assistant to the superintendent of the Tributary Mahals at Cuttack, he with his usual liberality and tact succeeded in inducing two thousand naked tribals to wear the garments and also to send their children to schools established by him. The conflicts between the ruler and the subjects which were going on for a long time at that place were soon settled by his good offices⁹. Instead of becoming a mere part in the framework of the British Empire he set up a standard of service by his personality. He was alive to the unsuitability of the machine-like system of administration which the British introduced into every corner of India. In his opinion it killed all personal influence and was ill-adapted to the requirements of Oriental races. He wished to maintain and strengthen the indigenous systems of administration by clearing away all the abuses associated with them. But the British House of Commons having no direct knowledge about the conditions in India, was always guided by the theorists who favoured the machine system. Johnstone also noticed that the British Government though in one hand showed its boldness in introducing a new pattern of government yet on the other hand displayed its timidity in sweeping away social evils. “We are wonderfully timid in sweeping away real abuses, for fear of hurting the feelings of the people, at the same time we weigh them down with unnecessary, offensive, and worrying forms, and deluge the country with paper returns, never realising that

these cause far more annoyance than would be felt at one making some radical change in a matter which, after all, affects only a minority. Take, for instance, the case of Suttee or widow burning. It was urged for years that we could not put it down without causing a rebellion. What are the facts ? A governor-general blessed with moral courage in a great degree determined to abolish the barbarous custom, and his edict was obeyed without a murmur. So it has been, in many other cases. Johnstone for his activities, suggestions and writings deserves an important position in the annals of early British rule in India”¹⁰.

The relationship between the Maharaja and the Political Agent for the last nine years till the appointment of Johnstone has already been stated. When Johnstone came, all his movements were watched and wherever he went spies, open or secret, followed. Though it was very disgusting he did not object to it. He went on carrying his duties maintaining the dignity of his post. By fair dealings and free discussions he soon became successful in disarming the suspicion of the Government of Manipur. Before doing anything he always tried to convince the Maharaja first and never tried to impose anything upon him¹¹.

Though Johnstone was very gentle and amiable he was always conscious of his duties and the dignity of his post. “In my dealings with the Durbar, I always tried to bear in mind that I was the representative of the strong dealing with the weak ... whenever it became necessary for me to interfere. I did so with great firmness, but always tried to carry the Maharaja and his ministers with me..... ”¹² “I never played (polo) I did not think I was justified, holding the important position I did, in running the risk of being hustled and jostled by anyone with whom I played, men whom I was bound to keep at arms length. Had I done so, I should have lost influence. I could not be hail-fellow-well-met, and though talking freely with all, I at once checked all disposition to familiarity, and people rarely attempted it”¹³. Once the Maharaja promoted Thangal Major. Balram Singh and Roma Singh Major to the posts of generals. Johnstone then being only a lieut-colonel quickly realised the move directed against him. In order to maintain his own position he totally ignored these

promotions and began to treat them as before. In absence of his approval the new designations of Thangal Major, Balram Singh, and Roma Singh Major did not become popular. At last, they begged Johnstone to address them as "General". They also induced the Chief Commissioner of Assam to do so. Though the Political Agent of Manipur was not directly under the Chief Commissioner of Assam, all instructions regarding Manipur from the office of the foreign secretary of the Government of India used to pass through that Chief Commissioner. For this reason the Chief Commissioner had a great say over the affairs of Manipur. In important matters the Political Agent used to act according to his advice. When Johnstone intimated his views regarding the above matter to Sir Stewart Bayley, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, he remained silent over it. Johnstone, of course, finally agreed to acknowledge them as Generals only on condition of performing some notable tasks. Johnstone was trying for a long time to establish one English School in Manipur. In the early period of the British rule in India, the general aversion to English education among the Indians is known to all. The introduction of English education in Manipur also at first seemed to be an impossible project. However, Johnstone did not give up the idea. When Thangal General, Balram Singh, and Roma Singh Major were approaching him for the recognition of their geroralship, Johnstone placed his proposal of establishing an Englilsh school before them. They after some hesitation agreed to try for it. Within a few days they convinced the Maharaja and secured his permission to open a school. Johnstone's effort at last became successful. In 1835 a Middle English school was established in Manipur. As a reward for the co-operation of Thangal Major, Balram Singh and Roma Singh Major, Johnstone addressed them as 'General'¹⁴.

Education plays a vital role in effecting changes in human society. Things which cannot be foreseen, which cannot be forced by royal will or which cannot be suppressed by bayonet are effected by education. In spite of many defects in English education it has helped us a lot to think in terms of democracy and individual liberty. Liberal ideas of the west have infected us with a new social consciousness. Our superstitious beliefs are gradually disappearing as we come in close contact with the

Western science. Our mind has become more rational. Gradually we are coming out of the prison-house of fatalism to the open field of renewed activity and self-assertion. The changes that are noticed in the political, social, religious and individual life of the Indians after the introduction of English education in India are mostly influenced by it.

After the acceptance of Gaudiya 'Vaishnavism' Manipur came into intimate contact with the mediaeval Bengali culture. But since the introduction of English education, new ideas began to pour in from a different source. Its consequences, of course, could not be foreseen at that time. As a result of Western education in Manipur theocratic monarchy became out of date. People quickly passed through the stage of limited democracy and have now attained full-fledged autonomy. Sons of orthodox Vaishnava families casting away all superstitions are increasingly coming forward to study science including Zoology and Medicine with all seriousness.

The question of British subjects and their rights gave much trouble for years. "Judging by the decision of the High Court of Calcutta that all the descendants of European British subjects were European British subjects, I insisted on all descendants of British subjects being considered as such, and subject to my jurisdiction. After a long struggle I carried my point and it very greatly strengthened my position"¹⁵.

After the retirement of Johnstone, again it became a problem to fill up the vacancy. The Government of India seems never to have realised, that excessive care and caution were necessary in this respect. The records of the past plainly showed that the appointment of a Political Agent was always a difficult one to fill satisfactorily, but no pains seem to have been at any time taken to find a suitable man ; if one happened to be appointed it was a matter of chance. "The work may not have been of a nature requiring the very highest class of intellect, but it certainly did require a rather rare combination of qualities, together with one indispensable to make a good officer, namely a real love for the work, the country and the people"¹⁶. Major Trotter who succeeded Johnstone died within 6 weeks after his appointment from wounds which he had received while fighting in Burma. In 1888, Grimwood, a junior officer of Sylhet, newly arrived from England was sent in Manipur as Political Agent.

Though he had no idea about Manipur, he accepted the post for a higher lift. But hardly he remained there for about 11 months and gained some knowledge about Manipur when he was suddenly transferred to Shillong. At that time many senior officers after the termination of their leave were waiting for fresh assignments ; but for want of suitable posts their appointment became a problem before the government. Mr. Heath, who was senior to Mr. Grimwood was sent to Manipur as Political Agent. He was not then keeping in good health and in absence of proper medical care he died within a few days. So in 1889 in the month of October Mr. Grimwood was again called upon to fill up the vacancy¹⁷. It did not take a long time on the part of the Government of India to feel the consequences of its thoughtless policy. Appointment of inefficient persons and frequent changes of the incumbent gave opportunity for domestic squabbles within the royal family of Manipur. Climax of this unstable policy, and bungling diplomacy was the Manipur War of 1891. Had the foreign department of the Government of India been cautious from the very beginning such a tragic affair might have been easily averted.

THE RESIDENCY

When Johnstone came to Manipur as the Political Agent he found the Residency a low and dark bungalow built of wattle, daub and thatch. It was rented from Surachandra the eldest son of the Maharaja. Money had been sanctioned for new Residency to belong to the British Government but there had been squabbles for a long time between the former Political Agents and the Durbar regarding a suitable site. One of them wished to build the new Residency on a small hill called "Chinga" about a mile from the palace. "In Manipur, the representative of the Government of India was regarded by the Maharaja as a powerful prop and support in case of his throne being attacked, as was constantly the case in former years. On this ground the Durbar objected that it was too far off." After many acrimonious disputes that site was abandoned. Another Political Agent selected a site in Ching-meirong That also had to be abandoned on similar grounds. When Johnstone came, he again took up the matter and found that the Maharaja was

much averse to the removal of the Residency from the old site near the palace. He said, "Where you are now, I can call to you, but if you go to a distance, I shall be cut off entirely." Johnstone agreed to it on condition that all the squalid houses and slums in the neighbourhood were cleared away, dirty tanks filled and others deepened and a large space cleared and added to the Residency. The Maharaja promised to do so and also assured all kinds of help regarding the construction of the new building. The new building with a large compound in front was completed by the end of 1880 under the supervision of Babu Rashik Lal Kundu, the then head clerk of the Political Agent's office¹⁸.

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CHAPTER XI

MAHARAJ SURACHANDRA

(1886-1890)

MAHARAJ Chandra Kirti Singh dies in 1886, leaving behind eight wives and ten sons. Before his death he distributed the offices in the following order :

Sons of the Chief Queen

1. Surachandra *Maharaja*.
2. Bhairabjit alias Pakka Sna—Shagol hanjaba (*in charge of horses*)
3. Kesharjit Singh—Shamu hanjaba (*in charge of elephants*).
4. Padmalochan alias Gopal, Sna—Dolairoi hanjaba (*in charge of doolies*).

Sons of the Second Queen

1. Kulachandra—*Jubaraj*.
2. Gandhar Singh.

Son of the Third Queen

1. Tikendrajit alias Koireng,—*Senapati*.

Son of the Fourth Queen

1. Jhalakirti—*Chief of the army*.

Son of the Fifth Queen

1. Angou Sna—*Officer in charge of roads*.

Son of the Sixth Queen, Zillangamba (minor)

The 7th and the 8th Queen had no son¹.

Immediately after the death of Chandra Kirti, Borachaoba and Mekjin Singh, the two sons of Nar Singh raised the standard of rebellion and fell upon the capital. Tikendrajit along with Shamu-hanjaba at once proceeded against them and foiled their attempt. Except this incident the first four months of Surachandra's reign passed in peace. Jhalakirti died within

this period. After his death Tikendrajit was made the chief of the army. The sons of Nar Singh again made a desperate attempt to capture the power. Surachandra grew nervous and sought help from Primrose, the then Political Agent. After some deliberations only one hundred soldiers were sanctioned. This time also Tikendrajit successfully defeated and captured the rebels. Borachaoba and Mekjin were handed over to the British. They were kept interned at Hazaribagh. Monthly pensions of Rs. 60/- and Rs. 20/- were granted to them respectively². After one year of Borachaoba's rebellion Wangkheirakpa Kangjeibung, son of former minister Bhubon Singh, all on a sudden made a bid for the throne with a large force. The Maharaja requested the Political Agent to help him with a force. But at that time no help came from him. Sanapati Tikendrajit was sent against the rebels. Kangjeibung with his sons were killed in action. Their forces were dispersed³.

Not receiving any help from the British Government during the last rebellion the Government of Manipur became very much displeased with the Political Agent and his assistants. The dissatisfaction was expressed through some petty incidents. This shows that the influence of the Political Agent was then at its lowest level⁴.

In 1887, trouble arose with the Kukis living in the frontier. This time also Tikendrajit went there with a force and suppressed the Kuki rising. Their leader Tomhu was arrested. Next year one Jogindra Singh proceeded from Cachar towards Manipur with 500 men. But he was prevented by the British Government.

Pakka Sna was very jealous of Senapati Tikendrajit. He did not view with favour the increase of the prestige and popularity of Tikendrajit. He also would not like Kulachandra who was at that time the Jubraj. The matter came to a head over a girl named Maipakpi. Mrs. Gromwood writes, "We knew the Pakka Sna and the Senapatti were rivals too. Both wished to marry a girl who was supposed to be the most beautiful woman in Manipur. She rejoiced in the name of Maipakbi She was the daughter of a wealthy goldsmith who lived near the palace ; her father was a prominent member of the Maharajah's durbar She was taller, though than the average Manipuri, about 16 years of age, and very fair, with quantities of

long black hair The two princes were at daggers drawn about her". Once they had a terrible quarrel over her "in which the Maharaja had taken the side of the Pukka Sana, and that the Senapati had sworn never to speak to the latter again".

Since then the eight brothers split up into two factions—the Maharaja, Pakka Sna, Shamu Hanjaba and the Dolairoi Hanjaba formed one side, while the Jubraj, Senapati, Angou Sna and Zillangamba formed the other⁵.

"Early in September 1890 the storm that had long been gathering amongst the princes at Manipur came to head and burst. The spark that kindled the blaze arose out of a very small matter indeed. The young prince Zillah Singh had been quarelling with the Pukka Senna over everything and anything that could be found to quarrel about, and at length the Pukka Senna got the Maharajah to forbid Zilla Singh to sit in the durbar, at the same time depriving him of some small offices of state which he usually performed. The young prince lost no time in consulting with his powerful brother and ally the Senapati. The result was that one night, about midnight when the Maharaja had retired and the rest of the palace was wrapped in slumber, the young prince, collected a handful of followers and with his brother Angou Senna climbed the wall leading to the Maharaja's apartments and began firing of rifles into the windows. The Maharajah had never much reputation for courage and on this occasion instead of rousing his men to action and beating off the intruders he rushed for safety out at the back of the palace and round to the Residency"⁶. The above account given by Mrs. Grimwood is supported by the statement of Tikendrajit⁷. It goes without saying that without the active support of Tikendrajit Angou Sna and Zillangamba would not have dared to take such an extreme step.

The Maharaja expected that the Political Agent Mr. Grimwood would help him to restore his position. But it was not done. Mr. Grimwood later on explained that any attempt with the insufficient force of the Residency would have been foolish⁸. The Maharaja was not feeling safe even in the Residency. He requested the Political Agent to make arrangements for his journey to Brindaban.

Mr. Grimwood accordingly communicated the intention of the Maharaja to Tikendrajit and his party. On hearing this

they became extremely pleased and agreed to make all the arrangements for him. The Jubaraj Kulachandra was not present at Imphal at that time. He came shortly after and proclaimed himself as the Maharaja⁹.

Later on he communicated to the Governor General of India, "I have most respectfully to inform Your Excellency that owing to certain reason, there was constant displeasure and quarrels between our brothers, for which my eldest brother, the Maharaja Surchandra Singh, making voluntary abdication of the throne to me (the heir of the throne) left for Brindaban. Accordingly I ascended the throne of my father and grandfather of the 8th Ashin last"¹⁰. It may be mentioned here that in no letter or statement Surchandra made a formal abdication. The action of Mr. Grimwood in this connection does not seem to be very impartial without seeking any formal permission from the Government of India of virtually packed off Surchandra from Manipur. His eagerness to get recognition for Kulachandra cannot but be viewed as his tacit approval of this political change. When the Government of India came to know about the developments in Manipur, it severely criticised the action of Mr. Grimwood¹¹.

Thus within a short period the rule of Surachandra came to an abrupt end. "The Maharaja was a short, but, ugly little man, with a face something between that of a Burmese and a China-man rather fairer than the Bengali natives, but much scarred with smallpox. He was dressed very simply in which—a white coat with gold buttons and a very fine white Muslin dhotee. He had a large white turban on his head in which was stuck a spray of yellow orchids. Gray woollen stockings covered his legs, fastened at the knee with blue elastic garters and his feet were encased in very large roughly-made laced boots ... ¹².

REFERENCES

¹ R. K. Snahal Singh, *Manipur Itihash*, p. 113

² *Ibid.*, p. 114

³ M. Jhulon Singh, *Bijoy Punchali*, part II

⁴ Johnstone, *My experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills*

⁵ Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Mukunda Lal Chowdhury, Statement No. 82A, reproduced in *Manipur Itihash*, p. 65

⁸ *Letter from the Political Agent of Manipur to the Chief Commissioner of Assam*, No. 351C, 4th December, 1890.

⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 288, 25th Sept, 1890

¹⁰ *Correspondence relating to Manipur*, 1891

¹¹ *Letter from the Government of India to the Chief Commissioner of Assam*, dated 24th January, 1891

¹² Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*

CHAPTER XII

THE HEROES OF THE TRAGEDY

DURING the third quarter of the 19th century the two persons who took prominent part in the politics of Manipur were Senapati Tikendrajit and Thangal general. They were patriots of the first rank and laid down their lives to save their country from British domination.

SENAPATI TIKENDRAJIT

Tikendrajit was born in 1859. From his very boyhood he was specially interested in riding and weapon training. As he grew up he became very fond of tiger hunting. At the age of 16 he acquired such strength and courage that he could unhesitatingly face large tigers with only a sword in hand. The killing of tigers became such a hobby with him that his father gave him the name Koireng (tiger hunter). At the age of 21 he accompanied Johnstone in the Naga Hill expedition ¹. About his appearance Mrs. Grimwood writes, "He was not a very striking looking person. I should think he was about 5 ft. 8 inches in height, with a lighter skin than most natives and a rather pleasing type of countenance. He had nice eyes and a pleasant smile. It was a fine sight to see the Senapati play polo. He was very strong, in fact the Manipuris used to tell us that he was the strongest man in the conutry "².

Tikendrajit though had no interest in books, he learnt to speak Bengali and Hindi fluently. He also tried to learn spoken English from McCulloch ; but could not make much progress in it. He was very individualistic in temperament and subject to sudden fits of rage. Once he became extremely furious upon a hillman who killed a cow and flogged him to death. For this act he incurred the displeasure of Johnstone. Johnstone rightly foresaw that after the death of Chandrakirti

Singh, Tikendrajit would surely come to the forefront, eventually affecting the Anglo-Manipur relations which had grown since 1832³. Tikendrajit of course shortly realised that no purpose would be served by adopting a hostile attitude towards the British Political Agent. Accordingly he changed his policy and when Mr. Grimwood came as Political Agent, he became his most intimate friend in Manipur. Had he not received the tacit support from Mr. Grimwood in his attempt to overthrow Surachandra, the task would not have been so easy as it had happened. Finally as a result of the Government of India's undue grudge against Tikendrajit and the hot-headed action of the over-enthusiastic Chief Commissioner of Assam, the British officers in Manipur lost their lives. This again led to the occupation of Manipur by the British. Bir Tikendrajit leaving behind his only son Chaoba and eight wives went to the gallows. Thousands of women shed their tears for him.

THANGAL GENERAL

Mrs. Grimwood describes him as "an old man nearer eighty than seventy, taller than the average Manipuri and marvellously active for his age.... He had a fine old face, much lined and wrinkled with age.... He had piercing black eyes, shaggy overhanging white eye-brows, and white hair. His nose was long and slightly hooked, and his mouth was finely cut and very determined.... Few things happened without his knowledge and approbation, and if he withheld his approbation from any matter, there would invariably be a hitch in it somewhere. He was credited with more blood-shed than any man in the kingdom If he had his faults, he had his virtues also. He was very enterprising, fond of building bridges and improving the roads about the capital. Like Senapati, he was a keen soldier, enjoyed watching good shooting, and had been in his younger days a first rate shot himself. He was an obstinate old man and it was very difficult to get him to listen to any opposition if it did not please him at the outset ; but once he had promised to get anything done, he did not go back from his word and one knew it was reliable⁴.

It is said that Thangal general was a Naga by birth and afterwards by virtue of his services he was taken into the

Manipur community⁵. He was born in 1817 and after putting a long career of service to the Government of Manipur he bravely faced the gallows along with Tikendrajit at the age of 74. He joined the service of the Manipur Government at a very early age. Once he accompanied the Maharaja to suppress the rebels of Thangal village. Since that time he came to be known as Thangal Major. In 1844 when the conspiracy of Maharani Kumudini Devi, the mother of Chandra Kirti Singh failed, Thangal also accompanied her in Cachar and re-entered Manipur in 1850, after the death of Nar Singha. It would have been difficult for Chandrakirti to regain the throne of his father without his help. When Chandrakirti came to power Thangal became an important member of the 'durbar'. Once he fell from the favour of Chandrakirti and was dismissed from his post. McCulluck knew his merit and efficiency. It was chiefly by his effort a reconciliation was brought about and he was restored to his former position. Thangal was an unlettered person and did not know English. But he studied the Character of the English officers thoroughly. He was also aware of the strength of the British power. Hence he tried as far as practicable to avoid incurring any displeasure of the British officers. But in order to defend the interest of Manipur he would not hesitate even to lay down his life. Tikendrajit also was afraid of this old general. But he always avoided any hitch with him. Inspite of great differences with Tikendrajit, when the war broke out with the English Thangal stood by his side. But one false step at the end of his career brought the ruin of the state. He in an excited moment gave the order to execute the British officers who went to the palace for a Darbar.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Mukunda Lal Chowdhury, *Manipur Itihash*, pp. 208-209
- ² Mrs. Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*
- ³ Johnstone, *My experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills*
- ⁴ Mrs. Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*
- ⁵ T. C. Hodson, *The Meitheis*

CHAPTER XIII

GATHERING STORM

AT the time of Surachandra's departure from Manipur the Political agent Mr. Grimwood gave a pass stating that Surachandra had voluntarily abdicated. He could not understand the meaning of the text at that time, as he did not know English. But on reaching Cachar, when he came to know of it, he immediately wired to the Government of India—"Just now opening Political Agent's pass learn that I abdicated, wholly untrue, Political Agent misunderstood me, shall submit full representation later on, solicit reconsideration and help"¹. Afterwards the letters written by Surachandra and Grimwood to the Government of India show that Surachandra had no intention to abdicate and was willing to secure the throne by force. He also had the support of a large number of Manipuris. But he was disappointed by the coldness of Grimwood. Hence he decided to leave Manipur and approach the Government of India directly help him to restore his position. Mr. Grimwood received clear instructions from the Chief Commissioner of Assam to bring reconciliation between the two parties and if necessary to apply force. Two hundred soldiers of Kohima were placed at his disposal. But to this effect Mr. Grimwood did nothing².

After coming to Manipur Mr. Grimwood realised that Surachandra though a friend of the British would not tolerate much interference in internal affairs by the Political Agent. He withheld permission to increase the strength of the sepoys under the Residency. As an orthodox Hindu he always maintained least possible social contact with the Christian Political Agent. Once Mr. Grimwood wanted to take some photographs of some respectable Manipuri ladies. But Surachandra requested him not to do so³. For all these reasons Mr. Grimwood was not very pleased with Surachandra.

On the other hand Tikendrajit could easily feel the pulse of Mr. Grimwood. He was his constant companion in the game of polo and hunting. He used to take special care for his comforts also.⁴ Isolated from the company of other Englishmen Mr. Grimwood liked the association of Tikendrajit and naturally became inclined to him.

At Silchar, Surachandra wanted to meet the Chief Commissioner of Assam. But as the Chief Commissioner was then away from Silchar, he decided to go to Calcutta. One Inspector of Police accompanied him upto Calcutta and handed him over to the Calcutta Police. There he went on approaching the Government of India to help him in regaining his position. He reminded the Government of India of the promise made to his father of protecting the ruler duly recognised by them⁵.

The Government of India was not unwilling to restore Manipur to Surachandra. But Mr. Grimwood strongly objected to it and pointed out the difficulties the Government might have to face in case Surchandra returned⁶. The Chief Commissioner of Assam also blindly supported the views explained by Mr. Grimwood.

Finally the government of India informed Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam that Kulachandra might be recognised as the Maharaja of Manipur if he accepted the following conditions :—

- (1) He should allow the Political Agent to keep 300 soldiers in the Residency.
- (2) He should administer the country according to the advice of the Political Agent.
- (3) He should agree to the extermintion of Tikendrajit from Manipur and help the British Government in this respect⁷.

Lord Lansdown had believed that Kulachandra would agree to all these proposals. At the same time Surachandra was informed that Manipur would not be restored to him. He would have to reside at a place selected by the government, receiving only a pension. Kulachandra would be recognised as the Maharaja. But the persons implicated in the overthrowal of Surachandra would be punished

To implement the above decision of the Government of India the Chief Commissioner Mr Quinton started for Manipur from Golaghat on the 7th March. 1891. There were 400 Gurkha soldiers with him under the command of Col. Skene. From Silchar also 200 Gurkha soldiers were on the way to Manipur. Mr. Quinton was instructed to arrest Tikendrajit by some clever methods, so that he might not have to meet with any resistance⁸. Mr. Gordon, the Assistant Commissioner of Assam was sent ahead to study the situation in Manipur. Mr. Grimwood told him that Tikendrajit would not surrender voluntarily and to arrest him would not also be an easy task. Mr. Gordon after gathering necessary information left Manipur and met the Chief Commissioner at Karong. On hearing the report from Mr. Gordon, the Chief Commissioner made his plan to arrest Tikendrajit in a 'Darbar' and accordingly sent instructions to Mr. Grimwood to arrange for a 'Darbar' in the Residency in which Kulachandra with his brothers including Tikedrajit must be present. He was directed to inform the Regent that the that Chief Commissioner would convey the decision of the Government of India in the 'Darbar' ⁹.

On the 21st March Mr. Grimwood went to Skekmai to meet the Chief Commissioner and then only he came to know about the plan of arresting Tikendrajit. He was opposed to the idea of arresting Tikendrajit. But he had to submit to the will of the superior officer.

On the other hand the Regent Kulachanra and his brothers were passing their days through a great anxiety. They were waiting for the decision of the Government which was not communicated to them upto that time. Moreover they came to know that Surachandra also was moving to regain his position. In the meantime Tikendrajit received a wire from one of his friends in Calcutta communicating him—"A large tiger is shortly to be bagged in Manipur." Different kinds of rumours began to spread in Manipur regarding the purpose of the Chief Commissioner's visit. The Regent and his brothers thought, Surachandra also was coming with the Chief Commissioner's party ¹⁰. They decided to resist the entry of Surachandra within the state, but at the request of Mr. Grimwood they finally refrained from doing so. At last they came to know from a reliable source that Surachandra did not accompany

the Chief Commissioner. He was then in Calcutta ¹¹.

The Chief Commissioner and his party arrived at Imphal on the 22nd March, 1891. Tikendrajit went to receive him four miles away from Imphal. Guns were duly fired in honour of his visit ¹².

R E F E R E N C E S

¹ *Correspondence relating to Manipur, 1891*, p. 8

² Letters

(1) *Surachandra to the Chief Commissioner of Assam*, dated 14th Nov., 1890

(2) No. 233, at 25th Sept. 1890. From Grimwood to the C.C. of Assam
Wire (1) from the C.C. of Assam to the Government of India. 22nd Sept.
1890

³ Mrs. Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Government order Feb. 1851

⁶ (a) Letter No. 351C 4th Dec. 1890

(b) Letter No. 520 P. 31st Dec, 1890

(c) Letter No. 520 P. 9th Feb. 1891 and 19th March 1891

⁷ Wire 18th March 1891

⁸ Letter No. 360 E, Feb. 21, 1891

⁹ Wire No. 27 N.E. 5th June, 1891

¹⁰ Mrs. Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*

¹¹ Mukunda Lal Chowdhury, *Manipur Itihas*, p. 123

¹² Mrs. Grimwood, *My three years in Manipur*

CHAPTER XIV

MANIPUR WAR

(1)

FAILURE OF THE "DARBAR."

MR. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam arrived with his party at Imphal in the morning of the 22nd March, 1891. Immediately after his arrival he ordered to make preparations for a 'Darbar' (conference) with the Regent and his brothers in the Residency, to be held on that very day after breakfast. It had been decided to recognise the regent Kulachandra as the Maharaja, but his brother, the Jubraj Tikendrajit was to be arrested at the "Darbar" and banished for several years. Precautions were taken so that he might not escape. The doors of the "Darbar" room were all locked with the exception of the front door, and guards were stationed in the adjoining rooms and also around the Residency house. In the meantime Rashik Lal Kundu and a Manipur office clerk were engaged to translate the orders of the Government of India into Manipuri. Sufficient precautions were taken to prevent any leakage of the information. The orders were lengthy, and the translation of them took some time. Before the translation was completed the Regent and all his brothers arrived at the Residency gate, where they were told to wait for some time.¹ It is very strange that the person whom the government of India decided to recognise as the head of a State was kept waiting for an indefinite period at the gate of the Political Agent's house in his own State. In this respect the Chief Commissioner Mr. Quinton displayed his utter lack of courtesy and tactlessness. The disaster which followed might have been averted and the Government of India could have easily realised its object peacefully if the regent and his brothers were not kept standing at the gate in such a way.

While standing at the gate Tikendrajit was informed by his

men about the elaborate arrangements of guards posted at different places inside the Residency. He had already a suspicion about the motive of the chief Commissioner. This was further strengthened by this information. Moreover he was not feeling well for some days. After waiting for about half an hour in the hot sun he returned to his house ². Prince Angou Sna also followed him.

After about two hours the Regent and his brothers were asked to enter into the Residency. Not finding Tikendrajit and Angou Sna among them Mr. Grimwood enquired about their absence and persuaded the Regent to sent for them as the "Darbar" could not be held without their attendance. At 2-30 the Regent's messenger returned with a reply from Tikendrajit that he was too ill to leave his house. Accordingly the "Darbar" was postponed till the next morning, March 23, at 8 O'clock, and it was impressed upon the Regent that his two brothers must attend. The princes had no doubt that it was Tikendrajit who was 'wanted'

Next day at the appointed time of the conference a message came from the Regent that Tikendrajit was too ill to leave his house, and therefore the Regent had not come ³. At about 4 O'clock Mr. Grimwood along with Mr. Simson went to the place to communicate the Regent the decision of his Government and to see Tikendrajit personally and use all his influence to persuade the prince to give himself up quickly, telling him at the same time that the proposed banishment was not to last forever, but that it would depend chiefly on his good behaviours and eventually, after the death of his brother, the Regent, he would be allowed to return to Manipur, and ascent the throne as Maharaja ⁴. In the palace they were duly received by the regent. The decision of the Government of India was communicated to him. The Regent expressed his inability to arrest Tikendrajit without consulting his ministers. Accordingly he was given half an hour time to consult his ministers and convey his decision. All the Ministers including Tikendrajit shortly met in a special conference to discuss the orders of the Government of India. At the end of the conference the Regent expressed his thankfulness to Mr. Grimwood for recognising him as the Maharaja of Manipur. But in view of Tikendrajit's illness no decision could be arrived regarding his banishment. On hearing

this Mr. Grimwood requested the Regent to issue a warrent to arrest Tikendrajit. He having declined to do so Mr. Grimwood sought an interview with Tikendrajit which was of course granted. At 5 O'clock he met the Jubaraj who was then really very ill. All attempts to persuade the Jubaraj to submit to the decision of the Government of India failed. He on the other hand questioned the authority of the Government of India to interfere in the internal affairs of Manipur. Thus being disappointed Mr. Grimwood came back to the Residency.

After the return of Mr. Grimwood to the Residency at 6 O'clock information was sent to the palace, to arrange some porters to carry the baggages of the Chief Commissioner who would leave Imphal in the early next morning. His intention to visit Tamu was already known. By this information it was intended to confirm the earlier decision. But it failed to hoodwink Tikendrajit regarding the real design of the Chief commissioner. Trouble was apprehended since the receipt of the news that the Chief Commissioner would visit Manipur. As a matter of precaution Tikendrajit collected all the arms in the State and necessary stores inside the palace. Mr. Grimwood had the report that the Jubaraj stationed necessary troops inside the walls of his house. Hence any attempt to capture him by force would surely be resisted. There were also remours that the Manipuris might attack the Residency. Strong gurads were posted around the Residency to meet with any such attack.

Mr. Quinton was much aggrieved due to the failure of his plan. He then thought of the application of force. He divulged his next plan in a secret meeting of the military officers. There were then nearly 500 soldiers at their command. One officer expressed his doubt regarding the prudence of entering into a direct clash with the Government of Manipur with such a small force. Because application of force even for a limited objective would eventually lead to a formal war. There was also a suggestion to wait till the arrival of 200 soldiers from Silchar who were already on the way to Imphal. But Mr. Quinton who had an overestimation in the capacity of his forces was adamant. Finally his will prevailed and it was decided to make a direct attack on the house of Tikendrajit at dawn and arrest him⁵.

On the same night it was originally fixed to hold a Manipuri dance in the Residency. Under the circumstances nobody

could anticipate that the dancing party would turn up. Long after dinner a man came and reported the arrival of the dancing party. None was in a mood to witness dance. It was also suspected that the man might have been sent to spy out the land, and find out what preparations had been made inside the Residency. He was told that since it was too late, the dance would not be held ⁶.

The Manipur employees of the Residency anticipating an imminent trouble left the place under different pretexts. Even the inhabitants of the adjacent village also deserted their houses. Rashik Lal Kundu and Dr. Lakshman Prasad had their quarters inside the Residency. Though they themselves could not leave the place shifted their families elsewhere. Tikendrajit closely observed all those movements and became sure of the next move of the Chief Commissioner. He already decided his own course. There was probably none who did not anticipate the war. Bamacharan Mukherjee a clerk of the Regent resided within the enclosure of the place. He also shifted from the place on that night ⁷.

On the apprehension of the attack on the Residency the British officers passed a sleepless night. The troops were ready long before dawn for an order to march ⁷.

BRITISH TROOPS ATTACK

On the 24th March 1891, at about 3-30 A.M. Lt. Brackenbury Capt. Butcher and Lt. Lugard marched from the Residency and besieged the house of the Jubraj. The guards of the house opened fire when they attempted to enter into the house. Fire came upon them from the palace area also. The palace was surrounded by five rows of walls and a ditch on three sides. Inside the palace in addition to large number of arms and ammunitions there were 4 mountain guns received from the British government. Hence it was not easy to stop the fire from that side. After a good fight the Jubraj's house was captured. But as the Jubraj had already shifted to the palace in the previous night he could not be arrested ⁸.

At the beginning of the attack. Lt. Brackenbury was mortally wounded. He was brought to the Residency where he died. The war did not come to a close, after the capture of the

house of the Jubraj. On the contrary it increased the determination of the Manipuris to fight. At about 12 O'clock, Mr. Quinton went to the telegraph office and found the lines cut off. The Government of Manipur immediately informed all its police stations of the outbreak of the war. Hence there was no way left to inform the situation in Manipur to the Government of India. The store of ammunitions in the Residency were nearly exhausted. Rashik Lal Kundu escaped from the Residency and took shelter in the Eringbung village. After twelve, fire came upon the Residency from the adjacent village. Major Bolean with a few followers went there and burnt the houses. This also did not help much to improve the situation. Towards the evening concentration of fire upon the Residency began to increase. At about 4-30 p.m. the house of the Jubraj was abandoned, and the forces engaged there were employed to strengthen the defence of the Residency. Mr. Quinton Mr. and Mrs. Grimwood, Col. Skene and Mr. Gordon along with some wounded persons took shelter in the underground cellar. That was the only safe place in the whole Residency. As the sun set, the situation became more critical. The hope of arresting Tikendrajit was long given up ; even the safety of so many lives in the Residency appeared to be an impossible task. Mr. Grimwood suggested to make an attempt to escape towards Cachar. It did not find favour with Mr. Quinton. He decided to stop war and try to come to terms with the regent. Accordingly the bugler gave the cease fire call. The Manipuris at once stopped fighting at the instance of Tikendrajit. The Chief Commissioner wrote to the Regent "On what condition will you cease fire on us and give time to communicate with the viceroy, and repair the telegraph ?" Shortly a message came from the Regent ; who wished to see Mr. Quinton and talked over the matter directly with him. This message was followed by a letter asking the British to surrender their arms⁹. On receipt of this letter the Chief Commissioner, wanted to discuss about the terms directly with the Regent and Tikendrajit for further clarification. Both of them agreed and assured safe conduct. Mr. Quinton, Col. Skene, Mr. Cossins, Lt. Simpson, Mr. Quinton, Mr. Grimwood these five English officers and a sepoy then proceeded towards the palace ¹⁰.

EXECUTION OF BRITISH OFFICIALS

When the party of English officers reached the place, they were led to the courtyard inside the fort where the conference was held. Large number of people including the soldiers were anxiously waiting outside to know the result of the conference. Discussions went on for half an hour without any result. Tikendrajit again and again insisted upon the English officers to surrender their arms. Finally the Chief Commissioner expressing his desire to carry on further talks in the next morning started with his party for the Residency. Tikendrajit also proceeded towards the control room. When the Manipuris, standing outside, saw the British officers going out of the place, they at once chased them with a terrible noise. Mr. Grimwood requested the minister Angou Sna to send an escort with them up to the Residency. Angou Sna with permission of Tikendrajit proceeded with the English officers. But no sooner had they reached the main gate of the palace, the Manipuris fell upon them from all sides. Lt. Simson was struck on his head by a sword and was severely wounded. Jomadar Jatra Singh at once came to his rescue. Angousna then gave up the idea of proceeding further towards the Residency and turned towards the "Darbar" hall. On the step of the Darbar hall Mr Grimwood was hurt by a spear hurled from the mob and died then and there. To save the remaining English officers, Jatra Singh at once forced open the door of the Darbar hall and put them inside. On hearing the tremendous noise Tikendrajit personally came to the Darbar hall to look into the matter. At his instance some guards were posted around the hall for their protection.

The old minister Thangal general was also present in the last conference. At the end of the conference he went straight to the control room. Certain old man bereaved of his son in the trouble met Thangal General at that time and instigated him to execute the English officers. It had long been heard and believed like an oracle that there would be a great war in Manipur. She would be saved if the Manipuris could offer to their God the blood of their five Chief enemies and bury their five severed heads in a ditch. The old general who was already much aggrieved at the behaviour of the English officers after a

bit of hesitation got that idea into his mind and ordered Jamadar Usarba to execute them. Usarba not knowing what to do went to Tikendrajit along with Jatra Singh for the confirmation of that order. On hearing this Tikendrajit at once came to the control room and asked Thangal General to desist from such action. There were long arguments between the two about this matter. It is heard that Tikendrajit ailing as he was grew very tired after the whole day's fighting. After his talks with Thangal General he fell asleep in the control room. Thangal General took this opportunity. He called in the Chief orderly Yangkarba and told him that Tikendrajit had ordered to hand over the English prisoners to the executioner. Accordingly the English officers were chained and given to the executioner. Their heads were severed from their bodies and put into a ditch. The people who witnessed the scene were much delighted finding everything went according to the long current prediction ¹¹.

MRS. GRIMWOOD'S FLIGHT TO CACHAR

The Chief Commissioner and his party had gone to the palace long before. Since then no information was received about them in the Residency. At about 12 P.M. it was announced from the palace that the Chief Commissioner and his party would not go back to the Residency. It was followed by the booming of guns. Everybody thought that all chances of peace had gone ; the Chief Commissioner and his party must have been arrested. Different parts of the Residency began to give way under heavy fire. All chances of defending the house were gone. At 2 A.M. Mrs. Grimwood, Capt. Boileau, Capt. Butcher, Capt. Wood with 200 Gurkha soldiers stealthily left the Residency and proceeded towards Cachar. Intentionally or not knowing the information ; the Manipuris did not pursue them. After some time finding no opposition they entered the Residency, plundered the whole house and set it on fire.

Mrs. Grimwood and her party continued their march day and night under cover of forests and hills. Through hunger and thirst and continued marches up the hills they were nearly exhausted. At places small groups of armed Manipuris tried to waylay them. But the Nagas all along remained neutral.

It has already been stated that 200 Gurkha soldiers under

Capt. Cowley were on the way to Imphal from Silchar. Hoping to meet them, the party of Mrs. Grimwood, went on non-stop. The two parties at last met on the 26th March in the Laimatol hill about 30 miles from Imphal. Both the parties then proceeded towards Cachar and on the 31st March crossed the Jiri river and entered into British Territory ¹².

During the eventful days which had elapsed between March 23 and April 1, nothing definite had been known by the authorities in India as to Mr. Quinton's proceedings and whereabouts. All that was certain was that he had arrived at Manipur, and had been unable to carry out his original plans. But the news of the happenings which had followed had never been despatched to the head quarters owing to the telegraph wire having been cut immediately after the trouble started. But when several days went by, and the wire still remained broken, and no information as to what was going on in Manipur reached the authorities, people became alarmed. Rumours came down through the Indian traders who escaped to Kohima that a serious trouble was going on in Manipur. It was also heard that all the English officers had been killed. The Government of India felt greatly concerned over it. First definite information was received from the party of Mrs. Grimwood. They were still under the impression that the party of 5 English officers who had been to the palace in the evening of 24th March were kept in detention by the Government of Manipur. At last a letter was received from the Regent "saying that the prisoners had been killed. I believe he stated they had fallen in fighting at first, but afterwards contradicted himself and said they had been murdered by his brother, the Jubaraj, without his knowledge or consent." Mrs. Grimwood ¹³.

"The burning of the Residency and general debacle ; the break up of the force of mostly immature soldiers who had fired away almost all their ammunitions all made the sorriest reading of all regrettable incidents in Indian Frontier History." The strength of the Manipur force against which the forces of the Residency had to contend was approximately 5,000 men variously armed with Snider, Enfield and Martini rifles. Col. L. W. Shakespears put the major responsibility of this disaster upon Mr. Quinton and his party ; "Why a resolute attack of a place where ditch and ramparts formed no insuperable obstacle

was not made instead of fritting away the force in small isolated efforts will never be understood ; or why the Chief Commissioner and party walked blindly into the trap, although it was stipulated they should come unarmed, and even at the gate, the young orderly bugler with Colonel Skene was turned back by the Manipur officer with the words 'We do not want children here' which all might have given a fair hint as to likely treachery. The two companies of the Political Officer's escort at Langthabal appear to have been unable to take part in events at Imphal as they were cut off and surrounded, until some days later Jamadar Girbal Thapa managed to cut his way out with his men and joined up with Lt. Grant's small force from Tamboo which was in action at Thoubal.

"Sometime afterwards Manipuri officers told ours that there had been no intention to put up a big fight, and that if a resolute attack by us had been made they were all prepared to evacuate the palace by the north gate ; but our evident indecisions and half hearted efforts stimulated them to greater resistance. The force broke up in parties and retreated, some reaching Kohima by long detours in which many were cut up, as also two officials of the Telegraph Department who were murdered at Mayangkhong, their graves lying close to the present cart road. The largest party with which Major Boileau, Capt. Butcher, Capt. Woods, the Subadar Major, and Mrs. Grimwood went effected their escape before midnight from the blazing Residency and retreated towards the Western hills and the Silchar road up which they knew two companies of the 43rd G.L.I. under a British officer (Capt. Cowley) were marching to relieve those at Langthabal."

"This British officer with his detachment left Silchar for Manipur in the ordinary course of relief of the escort there, and in complete ignorance of what was happening at Imphal. After a few marches he noticed incivility from Manipuri officials and disinclination to produce supplies. On reaching the Laimatol hill above Kaopum and descending into the valley, firing was heard on the front side and the refugees from Imphal were seen pursued by Manipuri troops which on becoming aware of the new arrivals on the scene who opened fire, ceased their pursuit and drew off. On the two parties meeting at the Laimatal river below, the newly-arrived officer learnt what had happened and

here made his mistake. Instead of taking his companies on according to his orders in Silchar, and attacking the Manipuris on his own letting the fugitives find their way to Silchar along a road devoid of danger, as most energetic enterprising officers would have done, he allowed himself to be persuaded by demoralised men to turn back and escort them to Silchar. On arrival there news had been received of the massacre of the Chief Commissioner and party. Had this officer gone on, as he quite well could have done, he would undoubtedly have been able to co-operate with Grant's little force and those at Langthabal sharing in the honour that fell to grant" ¹⁴.

On hearing the troubles in Imphal Lt. Grant who was posted at Tammoo in Burma marched at once with 50 of the 12th Madras Infantry and 30 of the 42 G.R. to assist if possible in relieving the situation. He met with stubborn resistance at Thoubal, 14 miles from Imphal and was surrounded for ten days with continuous fighting. Jamadar Birbul Thapa with his Langthabal detachment joined him there. After a most gallant defence orders reached him to withdraw and await the arrival of the Burmese column ¹⁵. Accordingly he began to withdraw. At Palel he was attacked by nearly 400 Manipuri soldiers. But in the meantime the army of Colonel Presgrave having reached there from Burma, the Manipuris left the palace ¹⁶. The day after Mrs. Grimwood and her party left the Residency the non-Manipuri officials of the Residency along with Rashik Lal Kundu and a businessman Janaki Nath Basak were put under arrest by the Government of Manipur. But by the intervention of Tikendrajit they were released within few days ¹⁷.

FULL SCALE BRITISH OFFENSIVE

Three columns were formed and advance into Manipur from Kohima, Silchar and Tammoo (Burma) to exact retribution for the rebellion and outrage. Nearly 8 thousand soldiers were employed in this operation. The distance between Kohima and Imphal is nearly 100 miles. But both the roads were very difficult. The Cachar road is nearly 80 miles long and was comparatively easy. General Collet was given the overall command of the whole operation. The column from Kohima was led directly by him. He began his march on the 20th April.

Mr. Mekeb, the newly appointed Political Agent of Manipur was also with him ¹⁸.

Information of the British preparations already reached Manipur. The Manipuris and their allies both inside and outside Manipur became very much agitated and felt greatly concerned over the fate of the Manipur state. There were at that time nearly 35 thousand Manipuris in Cachar. Several armed bands from among them tried to enter into Manipur, and fight for her independence. One of them was killed and 15 were arrested by a British officer. The Manipuris inhabiting at Silchar, Sylhet, Dacca, Shillong, Golaghat, Nabadwip and other places also became very much restless over the British move against Manipur which they considered their mother land. The hill people on the Cachar Frontier, the Chins of Burma, the Kukis of Chassad and even the Bhutias also thought of a general rising against the British ¹⁹. Within the state of Manipur Thangal General and other chiefs repeatedly requested the Regent Kulachandra and Tikendrajit to make necessary preparations for defence. But the opinion became divided and neither the Regent nor Tikendrajit favoured the idea of putting up resistance to the British forces. The whole State was practically in a state of chaos. It is reported that some ministers and officers of the state at their own initiative decided to fight the advancing columns at some selected points ²⁰.

General Collet before entering into the state of Manipur, informed the regent in a letter that if he submitted without further resistance he would be tried and his life might be spared. On the contrary he would surely be executed. In reply to that the Regent wrote that he had neither the strength nor the intention to resist the British. He expressed his deep regret over the loss of long standing friendship between Manipur and the British Government. He also informed his decision that he would leave the capital shortly and might appear before the general only on favourable conditions ²¹.

General Collet's forces entered the capital without meeting any opposition. They found the palace empty and the whole area presented a deserted appearance. On the 27th April the Union Jack was hoisted over the capital. The forces from Cachar also after encountering some opposition at Bishnupur

converged on the capital shortly after the arrival of the column from Kohima ²².

The only serious opposition to the march on Manipur was met by the Burma column near Pallel, where a determined band of some 300 Manipuris led by Paona Brajabshi had encamped in a small earth work at Khongjom. Lt. Grant himself was wounded in it ²³. Before this incident Paona was a retired officer of the Manipur army. In the hour of grave national emergency he responded to the call of the Maharaja and went ahead to resist the aggression. Paona and his men did not give way so long they were alive. Their courage and heroism received admiration even from their enemy. The inspiring ballads of 'Khongjem Parva' composed by Dhobi Madhu have kept the memory of this heroic battle of Khongjom still fresh. Indeed, it is in the true Kshatriya spirit Paona and his followers defied death for the defence of their mother land.

Before the fall of the Capital the Regent Kulachandra, Tikendrajit, Thangal general and other important leaders went underground. The common people also out of fear fled away from their houses. General Collet encamped in the palace and announced the occupation of Manipur by the British. Hence any assistance to Kulachandra, Tikendrajit, or Thangal General by anyone would lead to his execution. Simultaneously prizes were also declared for giving information leading to the arrests of the following persons at the rate mentioned against their names ; Kulachandra Rs. 5,000, Tikendrajit Rs. 5,000, Thangal General Rs. 2000, Subedar Niranjan Singh Rs. 1000 ²⁴.

After burning the Residency some people desecrated the graves of the British officers in the compound. Officers of the victorious army saw this and in the mean time the dead bodies of Quinton, Crimwood and others were also recovered. These made their blood boil with a feeling of revenge. But in absence of any opposition they failed to take vengeance. Several days had already passed since the arrival of the British forces in the capital, yet the Manipuris showed no sign of returning to their houses.

In view of this, General Collet made declaration a that no harm would be done to anybody excepting those who had directly participated in the murder of the English Officers, plunder and burning of the Residency and desecration of the graves.

On receiving such assurance most of them returned to their homes. After seven days by another declaration they were asked to surrender their arms ²⁵.

In the meantime Thangal General was arrested. Regent Kulachandra was in hiding in the Chassad village. Information given by some of his Manipuri followers led to his arrest. Gradually Niranjan Singh, Kajeya Singh, Angou Sna and others were arrested. Tikendrajit was still in hiding and was observing the British activities from a place very near the capital. Finally he took shelter in the house of a Manipuri magistrate, Balaram Singh, but because of his illness, he voluntarily surrendered to the British within two days ²⁶.

TRIAL AND EXECUTION

After the surrender of Tikendrajit the government of India set up a special Court to try the persons responsible for conducting war and murder. Charges were brought against Tikendrajit, Thangal General, Regent Kulachandra and Angou Soa. Tikendrajit was considered to be the Chief culprit against whom the three following charges were brought. 1. Declaration of war against the Empress of India. 2. Abetment to the murder of four British officers. 3. Murder.

Others were also accused of similiar charges. On behalf of the Government of India 15 witnesses were summoned. Among them there were 10 Manipuris, 2 British officers, who came with the Chief Commissioner, 1 Gurkha Sepoy, head clerk Rashik Lal Kundu and Bama Charan Mukhopadhyay, the clerk of the Maharaja. Five witnesses were produced on behalf of Tikendrajit ²⁷. Tikendrajit for his defence prayed to the Court to allow him to bring a qualified lawyer from Cachar. The Court refused to give such permission and advised him to appoint anyone in Manipur as his defence counsel. At that time there was no person knowing English in Manipur, suitable for this task except Janaki Nath Basak and Bamacharan Mukhapadhyaya. Two days after the prosecution had started Janaki Nath Basak according to the wish of Tikendrajit, was appointed his counsel ²⁸. The so-called counsel Janaki Nath had no legal knowledge and was never connected with legal profession. He himself said before the Court "I am a business man

.... I am not a lawyer. I do not know anything about criminal law. I can read and write English but have no thorough knowledge about the language. During my two years' stay in Manipur, I have learnt Manipuri to some extent. Bengali is my mother tongue. I also know Urdu"²⁹. It shows that Tikendrajit was not allowed the usual facilities to defend himself. There are also instances of omissions and misinterpretations by the interpreter Parthwa Singh appointed by the court³⁰. The court found Tikendrajit, Thangal Major, Kulachandra guilty and passed death sentence on all of them. Both Kulachandra and Tikendrajit appealed to the Governor General in Council against the decision of the special Court. Then also they were asked only to submit a written statement but not allowed to engage any barrister to plead for them in an open Court. Barrister Monomohon Ghose accordingly submitted a petition on behalf of Kulachandra and Tikendrajit. Regarding the first charge of declaration of war against the Empress of India, it was pointed out that Manipur being an independent State the British officers acted beyond their jurisdiction in attacking the house of Tikendrajit to arrest him. In fact the British forces without any declaration of war attacked Tikendrajit's house and desecrated the temple in a completely unprovoked manner. The Government of Manipur had no intention to fight against the British. Finally when the British forces were let loose against them, they had to take up arms as a measure of self-defence. Regarding the charge of abetment of the murder of four English Officers the responsibility of issuing orders had not been definitely assessed upon either Kulachandra or Tikendrajit by the Special Court. Whatever may be the theoretical position Kulachandra was kept completely in the dark either before or at the time of the execution of the English officers. Tikendrajit was definitely against their execution which was done in violation of his orders by Thangal Major. Monomohon Ghose also questioned the competence of the Special Court to try Kulachandra and Tikendrajit as neither of them was British subject³¹.

From the nature of the trial and also from the correspondence between the India Office and the Governor-General of India³² it appears that the British Government had already decided its policy against Tikendrajit and Thangal General. Regarding Kulachandra and Angou Sna the Governor-General

commuted their death sentences but ordered transportation for life. Their properties were confiscated. The order was announced to the people of Manipur on the 13th August 1891³².

Gallows were erected on the Polo ground for the execution of the hanging order on that very evening. "In the Raja's days a criminal sentenced to death was occasionally reprieved if a sufficient number of women appeared to intercede for him, and hoping that possibly the old custom might still prevail, the women had assembled in their thousands. As far as the eye could see the plain was white with women³³. Tikendrajit and the old Thangal General closely guarded by the Police and military were brought out of the prison house and hanged before all in broad day light. "As the drop fell and the Senapati and Thangal General were launched into eternity" cries and wailings of thousands of hearts probably heaved even the heart of the mother earth³⁴. But the cold bureaucracy remained still and firm. Vengeance for English blood was at last satisfied. The prestige of the mighty British Government was finally restored.

After a few days of the hanging of Tikendrajit and Thangal and Thangal General, Kulachandra along with his brother Angou Sna were stealthily taken out of Manipur at night and lodged in Tejpur Central Jail. From there they were transferred to Alipur Central Jail in Calcutta. Finally they were transported for life to the Island of Andaman³⁵.

The British action in Manipur culminating in the occupation of the state and the execution of Tikendrajit and Thangal Major created a great sensation in Bengal. Barrister Monomohon Ghose fought like a lion in the case against Tikedrajit and Kulachandra. People of Bengal read the news in the dailies with great sympathy for the unfortunate princes of Manipur. The stand taken by Senapati Tikendrajit and his martyrdom continued to be a source of inspiration to the revolutionaries of Bengal for a long time. Mukundalal Chowdhury in his 'Manipur Itihas' written immediately after the incident has a tragedy. In fact his is the only book which gives us a vivid picture of the 'Manipur War' of 1891 and also the execution of Tikendrajit and Thangal Major. Tikendrajit by his martyrdom has well earned a place among the national heroes of India. Fortunately the Government of India suggested by Shri Arun Chandra Guha, has included the portrait of "Bir Tikendrajit"

in the National Portrait Gallery inside the House of the People
in New Delhi.

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CHAPTER XV

MAHARAJA CHURACHAND SINGH

ON the 18th September 1891, H. M. Durand, Secretary to the Government of India, notified in the Gazette of India No. 1862-4, "that the Governor-General in Council had selected Churachand, son of Chowbiyaima and great grandson of Rajah Nar Singh of Manipur, to be Rajah of Manipur". In the Sanad given to Churachand it was mentioned that "The Chiefship of the Manipur state and the title and the salute (of eleven guns) will be hereditary...and will descend in the direct line" provided that in each case the succession was approved by the Government of India. The Sanad at the same time provided for the complete subordination of the Manipur State, and for the payment of a yearly tribute, which was fixed in 1892 at Rs. 50,000 payable from the 21st August, 1891¹. "For the treacherous attack on British officers a fine of Rs. 2,50,000 was imposed in 1892 and this sum was paid off in five yearly instalments." The administration of the state during the minority of the Rajah was entrusted to a superintendent and a Political Agent, who was given full power to introduce any reforms that he considered beneficial, but with instructions to pay due regard to the customs and traditions of the Manipuris and to interfere as little as possible with the existing institutions².

The investiture of Raja Churachand Singh was carried out on the 29th September 1892. On that occasion slavery and Lallup (whereby every male in the valley was bound to work ten days in every forty for the Raja) were abolished. In place of Lallup an annual tax of Rs. 2 per house was introduced. Within a short period, the powers and constitution of the existing local Courts for the trial of Civil and Criminal cases were defined, and appeals against their decisions were allowed to the Superintendent and Political Agent and to the Chief Commissioner of Assam. A small battalion of military police was raised.

At the time of the investiture, Raja Churachand Singh was only 6 years old. He along with his half-brother, Rajkumar Dijendra Singh, were sent to the Mayo College, Ajmere, where they received education from August, 1895 to July 1901. On their return to Manipur a tutor was appointed for the Raja until he joined the Imperial Cadet Corps in May 1905 ³.

Maharaja Churachand Singh though in course of time became very popular yet at the beginning his installation on his throne of Manipur was not liked by many, Specially those who were adversely affected by it did not hesitate to create troubles. When Churachand and his family came into the possession of the idol of Govindaji, God of the reigning prince, the family priests were promoted to the royal temple and the former Brahmins who officiated in the post for some generations were dismissed. The latter became known as Aribas (old) and the New Brahmins as Anoubas (new). The Aribas naturally had larger number of followers than those of the Anoubas. Notwithstanding this fact, the Anoubas enjoying royal favour, soon became aggressive against the Aribas, and sent members of their family to almost all the villages in the valley to wrest the disciples from the opposition camp. The Brahmins at that time had a very strong hold over the Manipur society. Even to-day no ceremony can be performed without the guidance of a Brahmin and no important religious or social matter can be settled without referring to the Brahmin society. Under such condition dispute between the Aribas and the Anoubas created a very unseemly situation in the society. Had there been a political brain behind this conflict then it could have been easily turned against the Government. Fortunately this trouble some disputes were finally closed ⁴.

Sometime after 1898 the need for a rural police force was felt and chowkidri system was evolved. One Chowkidar was appointed for about one hundred houses. These chowkidars received Rs. 2/- per month and half a pari of rent free land and 12 pots of paddy from the villagers. An interesting incident led to the adoption of Indian Penal code in Manipur. In 1904 residential building of 3 British officers and some other houses at Khwai Bazar, Imphal, were set on fire and in that connection 6 Rajkumars were convicted and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. They were to undergo the sentence at Sylhet Jail.

The jail authorities there refused to receive the convicts as no section of Indian Penal Code was mentioned in the commitment warrants. Whereupon the Indian Penal code was extended to Manipur ⁵.

In the year 1906 Raja Churachand Singh was married to Dhana Manjari Devi. When he attained the proper age in February, 1908 he was duly coronated in the presence of Sir Lancelot Hare, the Lieutenant-Governor of Assam ^{5a}. In the meantime in 1901 Lord Curzon and in 1904 Lord Kitchner visited Manipur ⁶.

After the coronation ceremony, under the Presidentship of the Raja a "Darbar" was constituted, to help the administration. The Vice-President of the "Darbar" was an English I.C.S. officer. Besides him there were six Manipuri members. In 1916 the Raja retaining only the supervisory control vacated the post of the President in favour of the English I.C.S. officer. The post of the Vice-President was then abolished.

The British Government having a firm hold over Manipur found it easier to maintain peace and extend influence in the Tribal areas of the North-Eastern India. From 1905 to 1922 the troops in Manipur helped the Government of India several times in quelling the disturbances in the neighbouring hills. In the Abor and Makware expeditions of 1911, the Mishmi expeditions of 1915 and finally in the troubles of the labourers of Hailakandi tea garden and the A.B. Railway strike of 1921-22 the forces from Manipur rendered effective service to the British Government ⁷.

During the First World War the Government of Manipur donated Rupees one lakh to the war subscription fund of the Government of India and also gave one lakh thirty-four thousand rupees as war loan. One labour corps of two thousand people raised by Colonel H.W.G. Colle, the Political Agent, went from Manipur upto France.

At the end of the war the Government of India reduced the tribute paid by Manipur by five thousand rupees annually for ten years. The Government of India at its own expense constructed a motorable road from Imphal to Kohima. In recognition of his faithful and sincere co-operation during the war Raja Churachand Singh was awarded the title of C.B.E. Finally

Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India, conferred upon him the title of "Maharaja" ⁸.

KUKI REBELLION

During the First World War the British Government in its eagerness to raise labour corps from amongst the hill people were faced with a large scale rebellion. The Kukis of Manipur were quite unwilling to leave their country and go to unknown places. The Chiefs unanimously declined to send men. Further effort on the part of the Political Agent only produced insolent replies. They clearly made it known that if the government used force to compel them do what they had no intention of doing, they would also use force. "It was also believed, though not actually proved that Bengal seditionists in Sylhet and Cachar, quick to divine where discontent could be fanned, sent emissaries amongst the southern Kukis urging them to rebel and thus to cause more trouble to the British Raj". To add to the already troubled situation, a Manipuri named Chingtha Sanajaoba Singh, set himself up as a pretender to the Manipur throne and went on collecting followers. But his efforts petered out. Within a few months he himself was captured and his followers were dispersed.

In the mean time on receipt of insolent messages from Mombi and Longya, Kuki villages, the then officiating Political Agent of Manipur marched with Capt. Coote and 100 rifles to visit Mombi, six days out from Imphal. Open hostility greeted them there. The place was destroyed. Meanwhile orders reached the two officers not to take further action against the Kukis. Eventually they came back to Imphal ⁹. In view of their speedy withdrawal the Kukis entirely closed their country to the British by a declaration. In December 1917 men of Mombi started a series of raids into the southern tip of the Manipur valley. The people in the Chin Hills of Burma also started trouble in a similar manner as a protest against raising of labour corps in that area. The rebellion eventually spread in the entire hilly region surrounding the Manipur valley covering an area of 7000 square miles.

The Kukis were expert women, their other weapons being the speare and dao. They also acquired numbers of old fire-

arms, and used a curious sort of leather cannon made from buffalo hide rolled into a compact tube and tightly bound with strips of leather. But this could be used only once, and rarely twice ¹⁰.

The British Government having been faced with a general uprising of the entire hill people of that area launched an all-out offensive led by Brig.-Gen. Macquoid. Nearly three thousand soldiers were engaged in it ¹¹. The belief that the rebellion had been fomented by emissaries from Bengal revolutionaries, has been referred to above. But "any idea that the hand of the Hun (Germans) could possibly have been in it occurred to none. However, at Tammoo in May, 1918, where a column was assembling prior to breaking up after the first phase of operations, the medical officer, going through the sepoy's huts found some Sikhs tearing up papers which they told the officer they would not want any more. He looked at the papers torn and whole and found photos of one or two white men, obviously Germans, one being in uniform, and on them was written in Hindusthani.

"If you fall into the rebels' hand show these and they will not harm you. The sepoys could only state when they were leaving Bhamo for the scene of disturbances a 'sahib' had given them these papers. Who the sahib was or if any strange sahib had been on the Chindwin side, never transpired" ¹².

By the spring of 1919 the opposition of the Kukis was crushed and they began slowly to surrender on all sides. In May operations were brought to a close ¹³.

KABUI REBELLION

Since the installation of Churachand Singh on the throne of Manipur the administration in the Manipur Hills ran on different lines from that in the valley. The Hill tribes continued to be administered on behalf of the Maharaja by the President of the 'Darbar' and his two assistants who were extra Assistant Commissioners, lent to the State by the Government of Assam. During the last Kuki rebellion the Kabuis suffered very badly at the hands of the Kukis. Though they all through remained peaceful and loyal, the Government failed to give them adequate protection. For this reason they lost their confidence in the Government.

Sometime before 1927 a Kabui by the name of Jadonang enunciated a new religion. The Kabuis became so impressed by him that they began to look upon him as a "chosen leader who would overthrow the existing administration, destroy the Kukis...and eventually set up a Kubuis Raj". Before long the Government became alarmed. Jadonang was imprisoned for a week in Tamenlong for causing unrest amongst the Kabuis. This had little effect. He continued to collect 'mithuns' and small gift from the Kabui and Kacha Naga villages. Some used to offer gifts out of real respect for him, some would pay to the new God founded by him for the protection of cattle and crop from disease. There were also many who were obliged to make offerings out of fear or to secure his protection.

The activities of Jadonang rose to such a pitch that the Commissioner of Naga Hills and the Political Agent of Manipur could no longer ignore him. In the year 1932 after gathering necessary information regarding the whereabouts of Jadonang, the Political Agent decided to make a demonstration of force. Jadonang already had left Manipur and entered Cachar where he was arrested by the Cachar authorities. The Political Agent in the mean time with a force of Assam Rifles reached Kambiron via Bishnupur. There he destroyed the temple and idol of the new religion established by Jadonang. The elderly persons of the village were arrested. From there the Political Agent proceeded towards Cachar, where Jadonang was handed over to him by the Cachar authorities. At Imphal, Jadonang was tried on several charges and sentenced to be hanged which was carried out in August 1931.

Unfortunately the trouble, far from being eradicated, spread over a large area. This time the leadership was taken over by his chief disciple Gaidileu, a Kabui girl. In 1931 when the forces from Imphal went out in search of Jadonang, they met Gaidileu, but then they did not attach any importance to her. After some time when she was arrested, she managed to hoodwink his captors and escape. Since that time the agitation assumed serious proportions and all attempts to capture her failed for a long time. The trouble continued to take the form of a "semi-religious, semi-martial movement" amongst the Kabuis and Kacha Nagas who had been told that if they followed the new cult a Naga 'Raja' would be created¹⁴. At

that time in other parts of India the Civil Disobedience Movement started by Mahatma Gandhi was going on in full swing. The Kabuis must have been encouraged by it¹⁵.

Gaidileu came to be known as 'Rani' by the Nagas. The movement conducted by Rani Gaidileu created a very difficult situation for the Government. She was then hardly 19 years old and had not received education beyond class X (ten) in a missionary school.

By the order of the Government of Assam the operation against the Kabui movement was placed directly under the control of the D.C. of the Naga Hills. Four villages were burnt, serious punishments, were meted out to villages which had been found to encourage the cult of Jadonang in any way. In the early part of 1932 a reward of Rs. 200 was offered by the state for information concerning the whereabouts of Rani Gaidileu. The amount was subsequently increased to Rs. 500 and the village, which would give reliable information leading to her capture would be granted 10 years full remission of house rent¹⁶. The Government at long last succeeded in arresting Gaidileu. She was tried and sentenced to imprisonment for life. Pandit Nehru made the following remark regarding Rani Gaidileu and her movement. 'Perhaps she thought rather prematurely, that the British Empire still functioned effectively and aggressively and it took vengeance on her and her people. Many villages were burnt and destroyed and this heroine girl was captured and sentenced to transportation for life. And now she lives in some prison in Assam, wasting her bright young womanhood in dark cells and solitude. Six years she has been there, what torment and suppression of spirit they have brought to her, who in the pride of her youth dared to challenge an Empire.'

In 1937 after accepting the provincial self-government the Congress leaders tried for the release of Rani Gaidileu. But they did not succeed. The 'Rani' was released only after the attainment of independence ; when she went back to her own area to dedicate herself to the development of her own community. The effort of Rani Gaidileu, 'the Joan of Arc' of the Kabuis, deserves mention in the history of India's struggle for independence¹⁷.

Maharaj Churachand Singh, like other rulers of Manipur,

was very religious minded. At different times he visited the important places connected with Vaishnava religion. By the side of his newly constructed palace he erected the magnificent temple of Govindaji. For the welfare of the Manipuri community he convened the All Hindu Manipuri conference at Imphal in 1934. Representatives of different Manipuri communities from Cachar, Sylhet, Gauhati, Jorhat, Nabadwip, Brindaban, Burma and Malaya joined in it. It was in his time that the Manipuris forsaking their medieval sloth took to the road of progress. The signs of reawakening became manifest first in education and literature. From the very beginning of Churachand's reign the "minor" schools rapidly began to be converted into "high" schools. Female education also started almost simultaneously. In 1924 Manipuri was recognised as a vernacular in the Matriculation Examination by the Calcutta University. This recognition was extended upto I.A. in 1931. The Manipuri writers went on enriching their literature with numerous original poems, stories, dramas, novels and translations from other literatures. Remarkable improvement was also made in histrionic art. It was in the period of Churachand Singh that Manipuri dance received recognition outside Manipur. The Maharaja was a patron of all these arts and culture. His polo team earned much fame in matches at Gauhati, Silchar, and other places¹⁸. The education department was under his direct supervision. He made arrangements to give higher education to his sons. His eldest son, Maharajkumar Bodhachandra Singh, was sent to England in 1922. Other two sons, Priya Barta Singh and Lokendra Singh, were sent to Allahabad and Mayo College respectively. W. Yamjao Singh was substantially helped by the government to conduct his archaeological excavations. As a result of his excavations (1929-34) valuable materials regarding the part history of Manipur had been unearthed¹⁹. In recognition of Maharaja Churachand Singh's meritorious activities he was conferred the title of K.C.S.I.. The Vaishnava Society of Nabadwip were highly pleased with his devotion to Vaishnavism and awarded him the title of "Gaur Bhakti Rasarnava" in 1937²⁰.

During the end of Churachand's reign the Second World War broke out in 1938. Some clever businessmen, in order to make a good profit by artificially raising the prices, began to

hoard rice to monopolise the trade. The effect was felt very soon. The consumers were hard hit. In every movement in Manipur women take an active part. This time also they came to the forefront, and the movement came to be known as 'Nupilan'. The Government on the advice of the Political Agent tried its best to suppress the movement. But in the end 'Nupilan' became successful. The Government had to take steps against the businessmen²¹.

During the Second World War also Maharaj Churachand Singh extended his liberal support to the British Government's war efforts. In 1941 he contributed one 'Manipur Fighter Plane' at the cost of Rs. 58,000. He was then old and felt the approach of death. Hence he decided to spend his last days at Nabadwip. In the month of September 1941 he abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son Bodhachandra Singh and left for Nabadwip. He breathed his last there in November of the same year²².

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CHAPTER XVI

MAHARAJA BODHACHANDRA SINGH

SECOND WORLD WAR

WITHIN a few months of the accession of Bodhachandra Singh, Japan joined the Axis Powers and declared war against the British and the American. At that time the British and American defence posts on the Pacific ocean being very weak fell easily to the Japanese. The Japanese forces within a few days gained the mastery over a vast area from Pearl Harbour to the eastern border of British India. The Philippine islands, Indonesia, Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, Burma... all came under Japanese control. War then Knocked at the doors of India. The British and the American Authorities became much alarmed. But at this stage the progress of the Japanese advance came to a standstill. It took nearly two years for them to consolidate their authority in their newly occupied area and reorganize their forces for an attack on India. The Anglo-American forces in the mean time found ample time to bring reinforcements and strengthen the defences of India. The Japanese attack was apprehended both the land and sea. The invading army could enter India by land through by two roads, one via Arakan and the other across the Manipur State. Though the Japanese invasion was delayed, bombing by the Japanese planes continued all through. Imphal became the target of intermittent Japanese bombing since the second week of May 1942. The Manipuris then having no effective means to defend themselves from air attack began to shift in distant villages in large numbers. The flow of refugees from Burma and aerial bombardment caused considerable upheaval in the state. After the first raid (10th May, 1942) most of the Police force deserted their posts and the S.P. issued an order on May 11 suspending the function of the Police. There were looting in the Imphal town and to a very great extent lawlessness and

disorder prevailed all over the valley. During the second raid (16th May, 1942) a number of dangerous criminals escaped from the Manipur State Jail. The Army had to be called in for performing police duty.

"In the Autumn of 1943, the situation of South East Asia was not encouraging. The Japanese were in firm possession of the whole perimeter from Northern Burma to New Guinea through Malaya and Netherlands East Indies. Their forces dominated the Bay of Bengal, ours (allied) were clinging precariously to the North-eastern approaches to India, with lines of communication that were barely adequate for purposes of defence, let alone for attack. In Burma the Japanese had at this time five divisions consisting of some 1,35,000 men, the normal composition of a Japanese Army"¹. In view of this situation the Allied powers soon felt the need of not only strengthening their positions in the Far-East but began to plan for a major offensive in that front through Burma. Accordingly it was decided that Lieut-General Stilwell should proceed from Ledo in Assam with the Chinese and American forces at his command to occupy Northern Burma upto and including Mogaung Myitkyina area, so as to cover the construction of the overland route to China via Ledo and Myitkyina. It was expected that if in the meantime Mountbattens' IVth Corps advancing from Imphal succeeded in occupying Shwebo-Monywa area then the occupation of Myitkyina by Stilwell's forces would be very easy. According to this plan in December 1943 Lt. General Stilwell made his advance from Ledo with two Chinese Divisions. In spite of strong Japanese opposition he maintained his uniform progress. By the middle of January, 1944, Lt. General Christison began his offensive in the Arakan front to capture the Maungdaw-Buthidong road. The Japanese were also not sitting idle. Sir Winston Churchill writes "The Japanese also had a plan. Since November they had increased their strength in Burma from five divisions to eight and they proposed to invade Eastern India and raise the flag of rebellion against the British"².

There was definitely a plan to break the defence of British India and "raise the flag of rebellion against the British". But the truth came out through the pen of Churchill in a distorted manner. It is known to all, what volume of discontent was produced in India by involving her in the war without her

consent. The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, with great disgust asked the British Imperialism to 'Quit India'. Had the British then listened to the voice of India, it would have been difficult for Japan to contemplate invasion of India. But the imperialist government decided otherwise. They in their zeal to wipe out the 'Quit India' demand from the mind of the Indians, arrested overnight all the congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi. The spark was supplied by them and it spread like wild fire all over India. 'Quit India' became the battle cry in all corners of India. People who loved and respected Mahatma Gandhi became furious and came out in thousands to hammer the hated government which kept him in prison. At that time due to the war the whole of India was virtually turned into a military camp. The unarmed masses were at last suppressed by force. But the respect and confidence of the people in the government was lost for ever. Just at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War Subhas Chandra Bose the foremost revolutionary leader of the Indian masses conceived a plan of exploiting the international situation to obtain the liberation of India from the British yoke. In January 1941, he escaped from India and went to Germany to secure German help for his cause. After the occupation of Malaya and Burma by Japan he came to Singapore. There he, with the co-operation of Japan, formed the "Azad Hind Fauz" from amongst the Indians in Burma. Churchill must have had all this information. If the "Azad Hind Fauz" succeeded in entering into any populous area of India, then it would surely have started countrywide volcanic eruption against the government. But in its stead the presence of a Japanese force on Indian soil would have produced quite a different reaction. The Congress leaders would have fought the Japanese to the last. Pandit Nehru clearly announced his resolve both to the British and the Japanese that he would not hesitate to take up arms to resist the invasion of India by the Japanese forces.

But out of extreme nervousness the government arrested the Congress leaders although it knew definitely that it was not the Japanese but the Azad Hind Fauz who were marking time in Burma to liberate India. Hence Churchill rightly apprehended a countrywide revolt. But he had not the courage to disclose the real fact.

On the contrary the activities of the Azad Hind Fauz were given wide publicity by the government as Japanese invasion. If the Indians had any sympathy for Japanese invasion then the government would not have done so. This shows that the government also believed that Indians would have resisted the Japanese if they really invaded India.

In February 1944 the progress of the 'Allied' forces in the Arakan front was not only stopped, their 7th Division became completely encircled. Timely supply of rations and ammunitions from the air relieved the pressure and saved the 'Allied' forces to retreat even from Chittagong. This counter-offensive against them failed due to lack of air support. Simultaneously in the central front also the Azad Hind Fauz was preparing an attack against Imphal. It forestalled the Allied advance projected towards the Chindwin³. On the 8th March, 1944 three divisions of Azad Hind Fauz launched their attack on the central front. General Scoones withdrew his IVth Corps, to the Imphal plateau, so as to fight concentrated on ground of his own choosing. The object of the Azad Hind Fauz was to cut the road to the railhead at Dimapur and capture the 'Allied' stores at Imphal to feed themselves. They also intended to cut the railway at Dimapur to capture the supply route maintaining Stiwell's force. By the end of March they succeeded in cutting the road to Dimapur and began to press hard on the fringes of Imphal plain from three sides. Kohima also faced the similar situation. The 5th Indian Division was flown into Imphal from the Arakan Front and the 7th Indian Division was flown into Dimapur which halted the rapid advance of the Azad Hind Fauz⁴.

Around Imphal the situation was still at strain. Our Air Force was dominant, but the monsoon was hindering the air supply, on which our success depended. All our four divisions were slowly pushing outwards from their encirclement. Along Kohima the relieving force and the besieged were fighting their way towards each other. It was a race against time⁵. 'On the third of June the situation was critical and it seemed possible, after all the efforts of the previous two months, that early in July the IVth Corps would finally run out of reserves. But on June 22, with a week and a half in hand, the 2nd and 5th Indian Divisions met at a point twenty-nine miles north of Imphal and

the road to the plain was open. On the same day the convoys began to roll in⁶.

Fortune at last smiled on the face of the 'Allied Powers'. Azad Hind Fauz after remaining in possession of nearly 1500 sq. miles of Manipur for about 6 months finally began to retreat. From their side nearly 8 thousand soldiers took part in this operation, which kept nearly sixty thousand 'Allied' forces encircled for some months. One more chapter of Indian struggle for freedom had to be closed there. It was too late when India came to know of it.

During the war Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh remained all along in Manipur. The British government was very pleased with him for his faithful support during that critical period. In 1946 through the generous aid of the Dowager Maharani Dhanamanjuri Devi, a College was established in Imphal. This fulfilled one of the long felt desires of the people of Manipur for receiving higher education within the State.

On the 15th August India became free and the paramountcy of the British Crown over the Native States also came to an end. After 56 years the Maharaja of Manipur again got full control over the Administration of Manipur. But the time of monarchical despotism was long out. After the war the currents of Indian political movements started flowing in Manipur. In the last week of November 1947 the leftist group of the Manipur State Congress launched an agitation for the establishment of responsible Government in the State. Beginning with picketing in government offices the agitation took the shape of non-co-operation movement. Conceding to the popular demand the Maharaja appointed a committee which framed a constitution for Manipur. For the first time in the history of Manipur a government was formed by the elected representatives of the people. M. K. Priyobrata Singh, younger brother of the Maharaja regarded as the most enlightened citizen prince held the office of the Prime Minister of Manipur. Although he shared progressive ideas the limited resources stood in the way of implementing his schemes for development. The brief period of his government was disturbed by actions of the disintegrating forces in the Northern Hills as well as the revolutionary insurrections in the valley. In 1948 the Mao Nagas raised their demand for merger of Mao areas with the Naga Hills (Assam). Defying

the authority of the government of Manipur they started collecting house taxes and taxes on the movement of local products such as potatoes, maize, cabbages etc. The movement however subsided soon. In the same year the Manipur Kishan Party (Krishak Sabha) launched a revolutionary movement in the North Eastern part of Manipur with the aim of establishing an 'Independent Peasant Republic' with its headquarters at Nongda. The sole inspirer as well as the central figure of this movement was Hijam Irabot Singh, an ex-Panchayat member of the State. The movement took a violent form and succeeded in establishing some free pockets from where they continued harassing the police in the rural area down to 1951. By that time most of the ring leaders were arrested and prosecuted. Hijam Irabot however escaped arrest and his whereabouts are not known. This movement of the Manipur Kishan Party may be viewed in the background of the International Communist Movement which had then been recking violently different parts of India, Burma and the South East Asia.

Since the attainment of India's independence the then Home Minister Sardar Vallabhai Patel had been working for the integration of the Native states with the Indian Union. Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh in accordance with the people of Manipur agreed to the proposal of Sardar Patel. On the 15th October, 1949 the Instrument of Accession was signed by the Maharaja in Shillong⁶ and since then Manipur became a part of the Indian Union⁷. The Government of India abolished the post of the Dominion Agent (formerly Political Agent) and converted Manipur into a Part C State administered by a Chief Commissioner. The Maharaja was granted an annual pension of Rs. 3 lakhs. His personal properties remained untouched. Though relieved on his administrative responsibilities Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh maintained his leadership in social and religious fields. Like his father he was the centre of all important religious and social festivals. He used to grace the religious 'Kirtans' by himself playing on the 'Mridang'. He regularly played tennis. Maharaja Bodhachandra died in December, 1955. His monarchy ended earlier. The King is now dead. His minor son Maharaja Okendrajit Singh, however continued to enjoy the pension, privileges and the title down to the early period of 1972. The Institution of Monarchy in

Manipur successfully played its historical role in two ways viz one in maintaining the stability of the society by effectively working its influence due to its descent from the legendary Pakhangba and Bahrubhan, through the religious sentiment of the people of the valley and the other by the direct personal allegiance of all the subjects towards the monarch. But the needs of the modern age have shaken the faith in monarchy which had now become an anachronism.

